

A PASSAGE INTO COMMUNITY – CLAIMING THE PAST, EMBRACING THE
PRESENT: TOWARD A TRANSCULTURAL TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
WORSHIP IN LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

A dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of
Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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May 2004

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has been presented to and accepted by the
faculty of the School of Theology at Claremont
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In October of 2000, one month before my official ordination as an African Methodist Episcopal Church deacon, I was called to a failing, nearly-dead, all-white American Baptist church in Long Beach, California. The irony of this circumstance is that while I am of Scots-Irish and German American extraction, I was called to ministry in a 99% African American denomination. I struggled with this non-traditional call. I quit the process twice. I finally surrendered to what proved to be the undeniable call of God in my life, thinking that I would possibly end up teaching at the college level, as I could not fathom how I would be sent to an AME church before an African American woman would. I was looking forward to teaching. I was teaching, in fact, in the Human Services Department of a local college. And now I was being called to a dying, nearly-dead white Baptist church. Numerous attempts to wriggle myself out of this ministry failed. My senior pastor from the large AME church in downtown Los Angeles known as FAME (First AME), Rev. Cecil Murray, heard my protestations: that this was a little band of cold, wounded white folks and I was a brand new, white AME minister – what could I possibly have to offer? Rev. Murray told me, “Child, you get a cold congregation, you don’t CATCH a cold, you take a sweater. These people need you. You need to go.” So I went.

Fifty years ago, Long Beach was an almost-exclusively white community. Because of the large number of immigrants from Iowa, the city was called “Iowa-by-the-Sea” for many years. Until the late 1960s, a yearly Iowa Day Picnic was held in one of

the many lovely public parks. Until 1928, there was also a yearly march of the Ku Klux Klan, in full regalia, down Ocean Boulevard. The community is in great flux. The federal census of 2000 the city was named the “most multicultural city in the United States.” In fifty years, Long Beach had changed from an enclave of white conservatism to a city that is home to the largest number of Cambodians outside of Phnom Penh, the second-largest gay and lesbian community in the state of California and to a large and growing African American population – both in the formerly all-white North Long Beach area as well as in the last bastion of a “retreating white minority:” East Long Beach, where Immanuel Community Church is located.

Immanuel Community Church was formed in 1913. Its current building was built in 1922 in an all-white upper middle-income area of the city. The money to build what became one of the city’s beautiful landmark buildings came from families who were newly prosperous (rich, even) because of the discovery of oil on Signal Hill, then part of the city of Long Beach. In his novel Oil, Upton Sinclair tells the story of the 1920s in Long Beach. Former neighbors become enemies because one discovered oil under their property and their neighbor did not. Newly-rich families flaunted their wealth in the manner of a present-day lottery winner gone mad. In 1922, the real life counterparts of these fictional characters built Immanuel Baptist Church. Revival fever was sweeping the country, Aimee Semple MacPherson was saving sinners in Los Angeles and large churches were being built all over the then-prosperous downtown section of Long Beach. Immanuel Baptist was one of these.

In Immanuel church bulletins from the Depression era, there are notices of lively contests among the city’s white Protestant congregations for attendance prizes. One

Sunday, First Presbyterian rang in with 500; Immanuel had 402. The Immanuel bulletin the following Sunday challenged the Baptists to beat the Presbyterian record. White Protestant ecumenism – if not racial or cultural pluralism – was alive and well.

In October of 2000, I was asked to preach for the remnant congregation of Immanuel Community Church, which had changed its name while retaining its American Baptist affiliation. Ten people were in attendance the first Sunday I visited, and about the same number the next time I preached.

Membership records for Immanuel show that the last real numbers of active church members date back to 1970, when a 50th Anniversary program was printed and a celebration was held for several hundred members. Then, the world changed. The Viet Nam War was at its height and U.S. baby boomers were coming of age. Hippie drug culture, mass rock concerts and “be-ins” took over the place of more conventional houses of worship for the generation that would have been expected to carry the church into its next years. The white Protestant churches in Long Beach emptied out.

Over the years since that mass exodus from mainstream white organized religion took place, Immanuel shifted with the cultural tides. Several Baptist clergy, about to retire and with little imagination, interest or enthusiasm for building ministry, showed up on Sunday mornings to preach, collect a pay check and leave. In-fighting eroded the congregation further through the next decade until, in the late 1980s, the congregation decided to go outside the Baptist circle to find some pastoral leadership. This proved to be both a near-disaster and an opening to renewed life. One extremely fundamentalist pastor blanketed the neighborhood with tracts about hell and damnation. Another had a

criminal past that was discovered only as his character deficiencies began to infiltrate all elements of his “ministry.” Neither of these men had been educated for ministry in a formal way and neither had a larger body to hold them accountable. In order to be able to afford to stay in their church, the congregation began renting out the unused portions of the formerly-alive building to different groups, taking no notice of theological or political issues. As a result, the building in which I found myself called to do ministry housed a motley crew of semi-cults: the International Church of Christ, two Spanish-speaking Pentecostal churches, and an MCC congregation about to splinter off from the more progressive larger MCC body into a Pentecostal fundamentalist group called Glory Tabernacle. The only unifying principle of the groups was that they all paid rent.

I initially agreed, reluctantly, to help the small, wounded, contentious, fractured, difficult group that called itself Immanuel on an interim basis – until it became stable. During my first six months, I tried to help them unravel a legal situation with the increasingly right wing fundamentalist regional body of the American Baptist denomination, which was trying to steal the property from the congregation, sell it and be done with ministry on this site. By the end of the six-month interim period, I had come to know and love the group, made up of very brave, mostly elderly members and one younger gay couple who were also members. At that point, I agreed to stay on as the full time pastor, to work at restoring ministry to the community I had come to love.

The first year of the ministry work was a struggle. It was almost impossible to convince the resident congregation that we could survive without being a big rental

property. This has continued to be a challenge, but we are making progress. The search for a unifying vision which might become a magnet for groups that reflect and further a common vision of Immanuel – rather than a mish-mosh of zealous itinerant congregations – became foundational to our first year. It became clear that the rapid shift from white “Iowa-by-the-Sea” to the most multicultural city in the U.S. provided us with a challenge. We needed to find some language that might span cultural divisions, both in worship and theologies as well as in daily life, which could put us in dialogue with the larger Long Beach community.

My background is in the arts. As a professional actor, I met with significant success in theater, television and film for 25 years. I also worked as a drama therapist for several years as I made the transition from an acting career into ministry. I know the arts (fine art, theater, film, music) hold the potential for reaching the intermediate realms of consciousness, the unconscious level on which people are less programmed by their conscious cultural conditioning. Giving life to the idea of using the arts as a kind of metalanguage through which we can grow into a multicultural worship community – and through which we might reach out to the larger community proactively to open dialogue across areas of misunderstanding – has become a large part of the focus of my D. Min. work at Claremont School of Theology.

During the course of this project, the metaphor of the open door between the earthly realm and the seat of heaven in Revelation 4:1 has emerged as a biblical metaphor for the intermediate realm in which the arts live. The prophetic vision that John perceives as an open door can be understood to represent a doorway between the present

and the eternal future, a gate between the earthly level of awareness and the realm of God, a passageway through which the Spirit travels in order to access the teachings of Spirit. This doorway is a place where art and ritual can combine to create a change, through which a Spiritual rite of passage may move.

We also recognized that a sense of the Holy, of the church as a place for the experience of the Sacred, had been replaced by a sort of social club mentality.

During the first year, we began to use art programs as a key to access Spirit, to create a climate for the experience of the Holy, and to build community. We incorporated the former ARK (Artists Reaching Kids) Gallery into our program when they were closing up shop due to lack of funding. The director donated all of the art supplies, art tables, chairs, and ideas, which enabled us to convert one very depressing deserted basement room into an alive art room and allowed us to provide the only art instruction for 75 students from Horace Mann Elementary School across the street from the church. Additionally, through the creation of the Third Street Project, we have replicated the Virginia Avenue Project, which is located in Santa Monica, California: offering creative dramatics, play writing and long-term mentoring for neighborhood youth free of charge. We house the Long Beach Unified School District's Adult Community Transition Program for youth 18-25 who need mentoring and training to become employable and self-sufficient. We have also held a Sober Rave, complete with drug education, and a hip hop break-dancing contest for 250 youth in conjunction with a city-wide campaign to empower and provide creative alternatives for our at-risk youth.

During the first year, one of the Mexican Pentecostal churches found their own church building and moved out, leaving us with wonderful open upstairs room for yoga and meditation classes. The second Mexican Pentecostal church also found a church space during the second year, which has given us another large room upstairs in which we are installing a computer lab for adults and children.

Background of the Rite of Passage Project

As part of the process of the creation of a multicultural worship art form, I planned a multicultural 80th Anniversary Celebration that spanned a weekend in November of 2002. We titled the event “Celebrate Long Beach – Catch the Spirit.” Saturday night we held a community supper and cabaret with music provided by Immanuel’s jazz combo, Fusion. The master of ceremonies for the event was a mental illness advocate who raises consciousness through humor about mental illness. About 200 people attended the supper and cabaret. The Sunday worship service included musical participation from Tala Fungani Tongan youth choir (United Methodist) of Long Beach, the Soldiers on Soul Patrol multicultural gospel choir, and Immanuel’s own multicultural choirs (youth and adult). Rev. Cecil Murray From First AME Church, Los Angeles, was the preacher for the Sunday afternoon event, at which a land mine survivor from Uganda also spoke to the 300 attendees on the dire consequences of not learning how to communicate multiculturally. We also held a Global Village Marketplace as part of the event, which was active all weekend and sold clothes and art from different Long Beach cultural groups, and included an information table for PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).

The 80th Anniversary service and events served as an introduction for our ministry to the community and received much positive response from like-minded community members. As part of our continuing research for the doctoral project, Dr. Jack Coogan recommended that we create a space for conversation among the voices of both old and new Long Beach, including those who are excited about the diversity in the city and those who are not so delighted with the demographic shift. Toward this end, we held three meetings with the neighborhood association, the principal of Horace Mann Elementary School, Immanuel members and members of the National Coalition for Community and Justice (NCCJ) at the church in order to find out how we might best serve the larger community.

These sessions were both informative and distressing. The meetings dissolved into angry attacks from some members of the neighborhood association, aimed at the school principal, an African American woman, at which time we realized we had discovered a wound that will take time and sensitivity to address. The basis of the conflict relates to differing ideas about the future of the community. The neighborhood association wants to “return the neighborhood to its historic beauty,” while the school is actively serving the children who really live and attend school here now. Many of these children are black or brown and 50% of their families have incomes below the poverty line. Opening ourselves to additional voices in the community has given us a more complex challenge to deal with, but a more realistic one than our original somewhat utopian vision of spreading multicultural communication through community-building and arts programs. We have been enlightened about the tension that exists in the immediate neighborhood regarding how to integrate the elementary school, attended by

students from both this immediate neighborhood and from some surrounding neighborhoods, into what is now an upper middle-class community due to the recent California real estate boom. Our challenge as a church is to be of service to the children and families of Horace Mann Elementary while still reflecting God's love for all those in the neighborhood. We also recognize the feelings of cultural displacement of the elderly white residents of the community as the rapid social changes progress. We have continued to reach out to the school, and our arts programs are now in place as H'artWorks, Immanuel's non-sectarian non-profit wing. The philosophical focus of H'artWorks can be seen in its Mission Statement (Appendix D).

The community outreach programs and the development of a worship community have taken place simultaneously. One pursuit has informed the other. The education of the existing congregation regarding the need to recognize the world outside the walls of the church as part of the church community has been ongoing and not an easy sell. The former Immanuel Baptist was an isolationist church in which ecumenical ideas were considered suspect. Over time, however, the members have begun to become comfortable with the church serving as a community resource.

CHAPTER 2

Definition of the Problem

The problem addressed in my D. Min. project comes directly from my experience as the pastor of Immanuel Community Church. When I was asked to restore a gospel witness and life there in 2000, the church was on the verge of closing. From a base of six members (most elderly), we have struggled together through a protracted, costly and acrimonious legal battle with the region of the Baptist Church with which the church had been affiliated over the ownership of the church property. After three years, we reached an out-of-court settlement that gave us both title to our building and a sizable mortgage to pay. In an historic move, in October of 2003, this formerly all-White congregation became the first such group to join the African Methodist Episcopal Church. During the years of solving the myriad problems at Immanuel, membership has grown. However, the biggest disappointment for me as the pastor has been that the original small but tenacious group refused to stop the legal wrangling until it became a do-or-die matter. As a result, many newer members who had joined because of the ministry left because of the overwhelming focus on a legal battle that did not concern them. There was damage to the congregational growth and retention and every penny of the prudent reserve the congregation had in its treasury was spent on legal fees.

There is an additional challenge in this ministry in leading an intentionally multicultural, multigenerational congregation that shares no common tradition. From the beginning of my ministry at Immanuel, I have used the arts as a healing group activity: through art projects and spiritual autobiography journaling groups; as a medium for

communication in worship through dance, music and poetry; and as an intentional focus for the outreach ministry to the larger Long Beach community – to which we offer art and drama classes free of charge. The arts programs have brought attention to the church from the participants in the projects. Some participants have begun to worship with us. Children began to come to church. We had no Sunday School. We had no educational materials. We found someone to teach Sunday School. We found good materials. At one point we had seventeen children in Sunday School.

As we scrambled to keep up with the needs of those who were being drawn into the worship community, however, a pattern has emerged. Young people have come to the church and counseled with the pastor, have attended Sunday School and arts programs and are searching for a spiritual home. In working to create that place for them, I have made a concerted effort to get to know their parents and have worked with our limited resources to provide Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, art and drama and computer classes. I have also tried to figure out how to welcome this ethnically diverse group of 11-14 year olds into a community of Christ where they might find a foundation for a life of faith and discipleship. We have practically had to beg people to teach Sunday School. Because the number of children coming to us looking for community was outpacing our ability to provide them with programs, we began to lose the children. I found myself engaged in the process of trying to both heal a wounded, contentious group of elderly congregants and to build an infrastructure for ministry based on a model of progressive theological ideas. I was dancing as fast as I could, and praying even harder.

My original idea for a project grew out of this circumstance, and I set about creating a Rite of Passage into an AME Christocentric multicultural community for these youth, using the shared experience of the arts to create the language for the transition. My focus texts were Malidoma Some's Of Water and the Spirit,¹ Sonbofu Some's Welcoming Spirit Home² and Nathan Corbitt and Vivian Nix-Early's Taking it to the Streets – Using the Arts to Transform Your Community.³ In researching, however, I began to realize that the proposed rite of passage process for the youth was premature. At the culmination of any such process there must be an intact community into which the youth are welcomed, and by which the youth are mentored. We have not created such a community yet. No matter what ritual/rite of passage process we may take the youth through, they would meet with the same void at its culmination which they meet in their daily lives away from the church; i.e., no adults to mentor them into maturity

New Directions

At this point an altered direction for the project became clear to me. The adult congregation needed to find a collective sense of place, rooted in their journey together and in a shared experience, through ritual, of the story of its progress from its Baptist roots to its AME present. The adults in the congregation need to create their own shared

¹ Malidoma Patrice Some, Of Water and the Spirit, (New York: Jeremy Tarcher/Putnam, 1994).

² Sobonfu E. Some, Welcoming Spirit Home, (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 1999).

³ Nathan J. Corbitt and Vivian Nix-Early, Taking it to the Streets – Using the Arts to Transform Your Community. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003).

creation myth, so to speak. While this specific problem focused the creation of the event, the process of undergoing the rite of passage and the theoretical support for the event has been evolutionary in its own right. I defined the problem initially as a community issue, but in the process have recognized it to be part of a personal search, as well. My own call to ministry as a Scots-Irish German woman into the 99% African American AME Church has not been an easy one to explain to myself at times. Through the process of this project, I have found answers to the questions I have held in my own heart. These findings are further discussed in the Epilogue.

Toward this end, I have created and implemented a three-hour rite of passage Maundy Thursday event for the congregation. I chose Maundy Thursday as the occasion for the event because it served as an ideal metaphor for the kind of cultural work we are undertaking. The Passover Meal being transformed in the Last Supper into a model for the first Communion service provides a kind of model of how we might recognize the past Baptist worship community as part of our ongoing evolution into a multicultural AME worship community. We extract the essence of the intent in forming a Christian church (i.e., the Christ intention) while letting go of cultural elements of the original community which would not be congruent with the new model. Holding the event on this day also serves as a sacred experiential immersion in our own version of that first Communion celebration.

Evaluation of the event will be measured by three standards. First, a control group of participants in the event will be interviewed one week after the event and questioned regarding the meaning of the ritual for them and the change in consciousness it has – or

has not – begun for them. Secondly, the pastor will reflect upon how the creation of, research for, and process of the event and follow up have informed the direction for ministry, especially in respect to creation of a program to enrich and disciple the youth. Third, as a result of the control group discussion, the pastor will evaluate the effectiveness of the process in focusing the congregation on a committed, collective future in Christ.

My Master's studies at Claremont focused on the interface of theology, social ethics and culture in the context of ministry. The doctoral studies have focused more specifically on two points: (1) using the arts as a kind of common ground for group process, both in healing and stabilizing a worship community and in building a ministry after stabilization; (2) extracting the dynamic focus on a relational God of the Black Church as a worship and discipleship foundation for building multicultural ministry.

This Chapter Two analysis of the Immanuel community in the context of the larger social dynamics of Long Beach is followed in Chapter Three by a review of the literature I have engaged in coming to develop this model for community transformation at the level of Spirit. I have included the study of literature on the African retentions in Slave religion followed by writings on the Great Awakenings of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in America, out of which combinations of Black and White Christianity emerged that formed both the Black Church tradition and Evangelical White Protestantism. I have looked at this period with the hope of finding a possible model that could inform the kind of cross-cultural work I am doing at Immanuel. The review of literature continues by engaging theological ideas relevant to multicultural worship and

culminates with a review of both art theoretical and practical sources. In Chapter Four, I present the methodology for moving a congregation from an unformed, un-unified place into an engaged, transcultural Christocentric worship community. Part two of this chapter is a DVD of the rite of passage event cut together with the follow up event one week later. In Chapter Five, the evaluation of the event is included along with methodology for that event and is followed with final reflections in the Epilogue.

CHAPTER 3

Review of Literature

W. E. B. DuBois' academic voice emerged powerfully at the turn of the last century, arguing that to beg for inclusion in White society is demeaning and beneath the dignity of the Black American. Inherent in his argument for the empowerment of the Black voice on its own terms is also a critique of assimilationists like Booker T. Wahington. For this reason, I include DuBois' observations on the Southern Black church in The Souls of Black Folk⁴ as an early source on African retentions in Black Christianity. DuBois is important as an early historical source, as in his paradigm-shifting book he calls for the investigation into the Negro Church in America, specifically the roots of the religious minds that formed the institution. Even though DuBois is a victim of the very ethnocentrism that he finds oppressive, as evidenced in his description of the religion of the Congo as "heathenism," he is a brilliant American scholar and observer and is one of the first to recognize the need for in-depth study of the topic of Black religion. Through his early observations of the social form he calls "the religion of the slave," DuBois lifts up three primary characteristics: The Preacher, The Music and The Frenzy.⁵ DuBois also sets out a course of inquiry for the scholar of Negro religion, representing a kind of marching orders which have finally begun to be followed by historians, but would not emerge again as a well-formed question until 1941, when Melville J. Herskovits and African American historian E.F. Frazier looked theoretical

⁴ W. E. B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk, (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1903).

⁵ DuBois, 115-125.

horns about the existence of a Negro cultural past. Herskovits' resulting documentation of African religious and cultural traditions was published as The Myth of the Negro Past.⁶

DuBois also provides clarification that the social function of the Negro church transcends worship style, recognizing the Negro church as "the social center of Negro life in the United States,"⁷ which serves as "town square, government office, priestly domain and gathering place."⁸ This poses an alternative to the social function of Mainstream White Protestantism, wherein the purpose of the church is to offer its members a common belief system and power structure, but not necessarily any experience that changes them in the process. In other words, one goes to a church service in the Black church to be changed, to go through something; one attends a service in a mainline White Protestant church to reinforce one's position in the cosmos relative to God and one's fellows, to hear some good music, and to fellowship with "like" persons. The cosmology and the sociology of the two forms are inherently different, and designed to serve different ends.

DuBois also states that in this Negro Church structure one can sense "some traces were retained from the former group life, and the chief remaining institution was the Priest or Medicine-man."⁹ This role would translate to that of the Preacher, who also plays a different role in the Black and White Churches. Thus DuBois, an early voice in the movement to recognize an African past as it manifests in American Negro religious

⁶ Melville J. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1941).

⁷ DuBois, 115-125.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

practice and social practice, provides excellent material for isolating certain elements of the Black Church experience that may be used as tools for creating a shared past for a newly-forming multicultural community based on the tradition. These tools would include the primacy of the role of the Pastor, the importance of music in worship and cultural life and the tone of the experience that he calls the “Frenzy.” My translation into action of the latter is to implement embodied, kinesthetic worship models, rather than strictly cognitive. DuBois also provides a model for the deeper spiritual role of the Pastor, as the inheritor of the functions of the Medicine-man. This provides the possibility that nurturing a community of faith into a new reality using the tools of the Black Church tradition can include a kind of shamanic role for the Pastor, and in so doing can work with a kind of “conjuring” (as discussed by Walter F. Pitts in Old Ship of Zion – The Afro-Baptist Ritual in the African Diaspora¹⁰ and by Theophus H. Smith in Conjuring Culture – Biblical Formations in Black America).¹¹

Pitts explores the “binary style worship ritual style”¹² in the Afro Baptist Church in rural Texas, which closely resembles similar ritual observances in African and African-derived religions throughout the diaspora.

Smith uses a three-section format to examine the biblical typography found in Black religion to explore how African slaves handily appropriated the Puritan sacred

¹⁰ Walter F. Pitts, Jr., Old Ship of Zion: The Afro-Baptist Ritual in the African Diaspora, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Theophus H. Smith, Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹² Pitts, 145-175.

narrative of the Exodus to form their Biblical narrative subtext.¹³ Using ethnographic materials by Zora Neale Hurston,¹⁴ as well as scholarly studies in shamanic religion, anthropology, sociology and literature, Smith recognizes the African tradition of “conjure”¹⁵ to exist in a creative tension with the use of Biblical typology in the context of Black Christian worship and culture. Smith also deals with the ideas of scapegoats and ritual violence as they appear in religious ritual as tools for purging the community of its shadow or unspoken side.¹⁶ Using the work of French literary theorist Rene Girard, Smith constructs a kind of “conjure theory” which shows how this ancient African ritual form is used as a way of creating “something out of nothing,” and how “conjuring culture’s” emphasis on healing and transformation¹⁷ are key African elements in African American Christianity.¹⁸ This concept of creating something out of nothing and of purging through ritual a shadow or unspoken subtext have provided strong underpinning for the Rite of Passage I have designed for a community which began in the early 1900s as a segregated White congregation in a city that still held yearly marches of the Ku Klux Klan down one of its main streets.¹⁹ Both the acknowledgement and purging of the past,

¹³ Smith, 3-19.

¹⁴ Smith, 22, 44, 55.

¹⁵ Smith, 72, 73, 80.

¹⁶ Smith, 99.

¹⁷ Smith, 13, note 5.

¹⁸ Smith, 137, note 29.

¹⁹ Ernest McBride, telephone conversation with author, 25 March 2004.

and the creation of a new future out of “nothing” are elements which have figured in my thinking while creating this piece.

Foundational thinking about the cultural history of slave society in Slave Culture – Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America²⁰ by Sterling Stuckey gives in-depth understanding of the nature of the slave cultural experience as foundational to the creation of a unified Black experience in America. The slave ships emerge as “the first incubator of slave unity across [African] cultural lines, cruelly revealing irreducible links from one ethnic group to the other.”²¹ Stuckey introduces the variety of African religious and cultural traditions that made up slave society and also relates particular African religious traditions and practices²² to their syncretic form in Christianity²³ by lifting up specific practices common to many slave religious expressions.²⁴ This syncretic idea can be used as a construction: a combining of two or more Christian cultures into one new form by focusing on shared subtextual beliefs of each group (i.e., summoning and communing with ancestors, the symbolism of the Sun’s Journey²⁵ and of the Staff Cross,²⁶ the ring shout,²⁷ water ritual,²⁸ and the role of preacher/priest as chief

²⁰ Sterling Stuckey, Slave Culture – Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

²¹ Stuckey, 3.

²² Stuckey, 35-50.

²³ Stuckey, 57.

²⁴ Stuckey, 10-14.

²⁵ Stuckey, 12.

²⁶ Stuckey, 13.

political figure/governor).²⁹ In the Immanuel Rite of Passage event we have looked at the history of Immanuel and focused on the “Christ intention” from the founders, while acknowledging, critiquing and atoning for racism, sexism and ethnocentrism.

Albert Raboteau, in his 1978 work Slave Religion – The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South,³⁰ combines anthropological, sociological and religious studies on slave culture and slave religion into a dense, vital history of the slave origins of the Black Church. In the second chapter, “The Death of the Gods,” he shows how slave culture replaced ancestral gods with the Christian God while still worshipping their composite God with the same intensity and specificity of worship present before the Christian God entered their cosmology. The multileveled, multivalent gods of the Black Church, in Raboteau, retain a deep ancestral connection while adding the personage of a loving Jesus who also has elements of the trickster god of African belief. Raboteau depicts a multivalent and complex religious worldview that is not the Christianity of the White Church, but can fit into the form – hidden in plain sight – and context of White Protestantism without losing its depth tradition in the ancestral wisdom of the African elders. Again, I have utilized this idea of summoning a common point of connection in the disparate ancestors of the Immanuel community – the Christ intention – to unite the community-in-formation at a deep mythic level.

²⁷ Stuckey, 10-13.

²⁸ Stuckey, 34-35.

²⁹ Stuckey, 77.

³⁰ Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

The second area of specialization that I have brought to bear on this project is the formation of a multicultural worship community, both through theological means and through the use of the arts as a connecting medium. In Exclusion and Embrace – A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation,³¹ Miroslav Volf, associate professor of systematic theology at Yale Divinity School, combines his personal perspective – as a Croatian immigrant living in Los Angeles in a time when both places have erupted into ethnic warfare – as a metaphor for the kind of challenge we are called to in doing Christian ministry in a multicultural late twentieth-century world. When Volf visits his native country, he discovers that the ethnic divisions there have created a social climate in which he is required to identify as either a Croat or a Serb, when he is ethnically both. He also recognizes that this “excessive demand on loyalty” (to one ethnicity or another) is born out of a fragmented world in which differentness – rather than commonality – predominates. In recognizing the particular sensitivity for which his particular biography allows, Volf addresses the sociological ideas of “same” and “other”³² as particularly meaningful for him. In trying to arrive at a theological way of talking about the problems of identity which we confront in our modern world, he explores Jurgen Moltmann’s metaphor of the Cross as a place where both victim and victimizer can be united in one relationship through Christ: “put under God’s protection” together.³³ While Volf suggests that the concentration of the theologian should be “less on social arrangements and more on fostering the kind of social agents capable of

³¹ Miroslav Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

³² Volf, 16-20

³³ Volf, 22-23.

envisioning and creating just, truthful, and peaceful societies, and on shaping a cultural climate in which such agents will thrive,”³⁴ he recognizes that the work of attending to social arrangements is essential. It is his conclusion, however, that he has little insight into how social arrangements might be formed to best foster cross-cultural dialogue, but that such answers will come if the creation of the right kinds of social agents is encouraged. So Volf’s emphasis would be on nurturing the right kind of persons, and those persons will come up with answers.

The intersection of this work with my project has to do with the choice of Maundy Thursday and the larger Holy Week context within which to frame the Rite of Passage event. According to Jurgen Moltmann in The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation,³⁵ Volf discusses the significance of the cross and passion week as a metaphor for the bringing together of disparate forces into a creation of new life: “and since God was in Christ, through his passion Christ brings into the passion history of this world the eternal fellowship of God and divine justice and righteousness and creates life.”³⁶ The idea of “self donation for their enemies and their reception into the eternal communion of God” moves Volf into the inclusion of the Lord’s Supper through the observation of solidarity as defined in “suffering together with” rather than just as “struggling on the side of” as a powerful ritual reaffirmation of oneness. It is thus a communal act of solidarity with others present.³⁷ Using the Lord’s Supper in the larger

³⁴ Volf, 21.

³⁵ Jurgen Moltmann, The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992).

³⁶ Moltmann, 23.

context of Holy Week for the Immanuel Rite of Passage allows for the enactment of a shared Christian rite of passage across cultures, through the darkness and separateness of our past – Good Friday – into rebirth as a new triumphant entity in Christ. This Holy Week observance also creates a new tradition for the Immanuel community: this first conscious creation of their worship community can be reinforced through ritual on future Maundy Thursdays – a shared yearly ritual of reconciliation.

Manuel Ortiz' One New People – Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church³⁸ addresses the practical challenges in creating multiethnic ministry. Before presenting several biblical models for use as templates of multicultural or multiethnic ministry, Ortiz addresses one of the prevailing ideas opposed to the creation of multicultural ministries that is commonly advanced in some seminary education. Attributing the “homogeneous unit principle” (HUP) to the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission, Ortiz explains the principle that underlies that theory.³⁹ The idea is that people are served in ministry best in their own cultural and linguistic context. This argument is one that I have encountered over the years of my seminary education as well, and I find Ortiz's thinking on the subject to be extremely clarifying. It would seem that while certain personal concepts of relationship with God may be easier to communicate within a mono-cultural milieu, the question really rests upon whether or not one sees the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Manuel Ortiz, One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

³⁹ Ortiz, 44-46.

global community as the context in which one is striving for reconciliation or if the small separate-but-equal (or -unequal) model is more what one espouses. Which model one adopts is a theological question. In quoting Peter Wagner as believing that “HUP will in no way promote segregated and racist churches,”⁴⁰ Ortiz disagrees – and so do I. He has found in his research that the most successful multiethnic congregations are those which focus on reconciliation. In describing the failure of the prevailing mono-cultural model, Ortiz says, “I believe that HUP has been a hindrance to race relations and to racial and ethnic reconciliation in the Christian community. At this time, we, the church in the U.S., are a great disappointment in terms of manifesting the new community founded by Jesus Christ and called to worship the King of the kingdom in the ministry of reconciliation.”⁴¹ Placing the project in which I am engaged in dialogue with the ideas of Manuel Ortiz, I concur that the focus on reconciliation is a necessary component of multicultural ministry. It would also seem to be essential to continue the process of working toward reconciliation – while revisiting the origins of racism – as part of the ongoing process of the education within intentional multicultural ministry.

Dismantling Racism – The Continuing Challenge to White America by Joseph Barndt,⁴² along with providing useful definitions of racism in its many contexts: institutional, cultural and religious, provides a model for healing and recovery which is very helpful for the community-building work I am attempting to do. In his chapter on “Individual Racism,” Barndt suggests that racism, especially in its American context, can

⁴⁰ Ortiz, 45.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Joseph Barndt, Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1991).

be seen as a type of addiction.⁴³ This would indicate that the condition is a kind of illness, and something over which a person is powerless. Barndt then suggests a kind of 12 Step Model for an ongoing, lifetime recovery from racism: moving from denial into acknowledgement of the condition, then into admitting our powerlessness over the condition, accepting the help of God and others – all of this on a continuum. The idea here is that there is not complete recovery from the condition, but rather a daily reprieve contingent upon our willingness to continue with recovery. This idea gives meaning to the process of seeking atonement through repentance, which has been included in the Love Feast section of the Rite of Passage. The idea that repentance is not a one-time action and that it is indeed an action and not just words, gives deep symbolic and actual underpinning to the act of asking forgiveness for the sins of racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, elitism and classism, which is a part of the Immanuel Rite of Passage.

The person whose thinking and whose practical efforts to create “The Beloved Community”⁴⁴ best typifies the blending of the two areas of my focus, the Black Church experience and intentional multicultural ministry, is theologian, clergyman, mystic and civil rights advocate Howard Thurman.⁴⁵ Both Thurman’s biography and his writings have shaped my thinking in terms of multicultural, inclusive worship. It is, however, his writings on the Negro spiritual and the tradition from which this art form springs that is

⁴³ Barndt, 69-71.

⁴⁴ A model of reconciling community popularized by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

⁴⁵ African American Publications Biography Resource Center, s.v. “Howard Thurman,” 2001 ed.; accessed 12 Feb. 2003; available from <http://www.africanpubs.com/apps/bios/1090ThurmanHoward>.

perhaps most instructive for this project. In Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death, Thurman takes on the topic of the deep spiritual role the Spiritual plays in his own walk with God.⁴⁶ He is perhaps better known by many for his belief in non-violence as experienced on a trip to India to meet with Mahatma Gandhi. His reticence to discuss the Spiritual for many years was, he explains, a resistance to having the depth tradition of his forbearers turned into a cheap commodity, into something akin to the minstrel shows in which the songs had been treated disrespectfully by vaudevillians. He remembers the time when he was a student at Morehouse College and a group from the General Education Board was escorted into the chapel during a service. The director of music signaled the person who led the spirituals to lead the group in a song. He sang the first line, which was normally followed by the student body singing their response. No one sang. He sang the first line again. Again, no one sang. The president of the college was embarrassed and that evening expressed his extreme displeasure to the student body in a meeting. Thurman tells us that, “the response was very simple. We refuse to sing our songs to delight and amuse White people. The songs are ours and part of our source of our own inspiration transmitted to us by our forefathers.” This story illustrates, perhaps even better than the in-depth treatment of the individual spirituals which follows in this book, one major concern a scholar or pastor must take seriously in tapping into the root of the power of Black Christianity for a multicultural ministry. It is essential to create context: to teach history and to teach respect for the ancestral courage and creativity which created this form in the midst of despairing conditions and used it to save themselves and their children from the sin of

⁴⁶ Howard Thurman, Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death, (Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 1975).

despair. Perhaps only those who have struggled deeply, who are oppressed in some significant way, have the need or the stamina to come to the depth experience of a reconciling ministry with a kind of hunger which passionately pursues God's voice even in the midst of apparent lack of tomorrow.

Thurman acknowledges the source material for this religious folk song, the Negro Spiritual, as being threefold: (1) the Old and New Testaments, (2) the world of nature, and (3) the personal experiences of religion that were the common lot of the people, emerging from their inner life.⁴⁷ These three elements echo throughout practically all of the songs, and provide a kind of theological framework for both the Black Church and for a multicultural church-in-formation. The hermeneutical work in an emerging congregation, at the level of the creation of a common myth, would necessarily be an outgrowth of that particular cultural experience. So, like the church at Corinth and the church at Ephesus, the forms these multicultural Christianities take will be particular to their communities.

This is not an academic pursuit for Thurman. The Spiritual is his spiritual well. For this reason, one uses the insights he puts forward with great reverence and respect. In looking at the life work of Thurman, especially in his pastoring of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco, we find an early model for the kind of work we are doing at Immanuel. In reading about that early endeavor for Thurman, the most understandable reason I can find for the lack of "success" – in the sense of becoming a larger movement at that time – of his endeavor, focuses on social justice issues. The utopian ideal of different ethnicities worshipping together was not possible in an America

⁴⁷ Thurman, 12.

where the Japanese members of the congregation were about to be sent away to internment camps and in which the African American members did not yet possess the full civil rights of their European American counterparts. It is my hope that we have made the kind of legislative headway at this time to back up a prophetic community of faith that can further the ideals of equality which have been legislated, but which are still far from universally-practiced realities.

Ultimately, the kind of transformative work which is possible within the context of a Christian community will depend on arriving at a common understanding of God, a common model of God. Constructions of the Trinity, for instance, are viewed within a social context, and will necessarily influence how the community reflects God in their midst. In keeping with a focus on an African religious worldview, as it influences the Black Church as it offers a possible tool for unifying cultures through a deep understanding of the redemptive imperative in the Jesus message, I turn to A. Okechukwu Ogbannaya's On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity.⁴⁸ Ogbannaya looks at the African worldview and context of the church fathers, specifically of Tertullian. The book suggests that through this understanding of the communitarian aspect of the Divine inner life and its social implications, we may find access to a "new pluriform way of becoming Christian in an increasingly conflictual pluralistic world."⁴⁹ In discussing the importance of embracing a common model of God

⁴⁸ A. Okechukwu Ogbannaya, On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity, (New York: Paragon, 1994).

⁴⁹ Ogbannaya, cover comments.

in order to create a community in Christ, Ogbannaya quotes Leonard Boff,⁵⁰ who suggests that the “African worldview as collective vs. hierarchical provides a basis for an inclusive universal fellowship.”⁵¹ Ogbannaya continues, suggesting that “a search for relationship that allows worshippers to deal with differences through ritual, through symbol”⁵² provides a method for the discovery of that common ground. In the African worldview, authority has more to do with a hierarch of responsibility in community “maintaining a holistic emphasis of the nature of the Divine by holding to a Divine communal image.”⁵³ This view is markedly different from the Western European model of authority, which is based on hierarchical systems of power: power held over a larger group by a small elite, rather than power shared.

Perhaps the one key point that is an essential fulcrum on which this project turns is the acknowledgement of the role of the slave interpreters of Christianity in creating what I believe to be a true form of the Jesus message in the midst of a gross misappropriation of the message through White Protestantism. Thurman states simply, “By some amazing but vastly creative spiritual insight the slave undertook the redemption of a religion that the master had profaned in his midst.”⁵⁴ It is this redemptive interpretation and understanding of the biblical message that I respectfully endeavor to use as the basis for a multicultural hermeneutic which may save segregated

⁵⁰ Leonard Boff, Trinity and Society, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988).

⁵¹ Boff, xv.

⁵² Ogbannaya, 61.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Thurman, 36.

societies of worship in the twenty-first century from their profaned version of the same truths.

Naming

We are giving birth, through the implementation of the Rite of Passage experience, into something new. We are called upon to find not only a new identity, but also a new name by which to call ourselves. With this in mind, I want to address a change in terms. “Multicultural” connotes “many,” but also connotes a kind of separateness. As with many words that become over-used, it is in danger of losing its meaning through overexposure. For this reason, from this point on I will use the term “transcultural” to describe the kind of communication in worship and community which we seek to create. “Trans” indicated “across;” hence, a commitment to communicating across cultural lines and back again – as opposed to standing together in one’s differentness. This word seems to me to be more dynamic than multicultural, and will allow for movement across the cultural gaps which separate.

The use of “the arts” as the language for this Rite of Passage is born in my experience as a professional theatre artist and drama therapist for thirty years, and as a passionate non-professional writer, painter, collage artist and clothing designer for as long. The practice of the arts in some form has kept me sane, has opened the doors into deeper wisdom of many kinds for me and has, through the worship tradition of the AME Church, brought me back to a God I had abandoned for years. So, it is my medium. Art. In general. In specific for this event, I have utilized a combination of installation/performance art, drama, music and a form that ties the three together, which

could be called socio-drama. The field of socio-drama is an emerging discipline which combines sociology and drama into a dynamic form for community transformation through the creation and performance of a living collaborative art event.

In her classic text Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures, Susan Langer defines the function of art from a philosophical perspective.⁵⁵ She begins by discussing the differences and similarities between art and science. Art is never general. Art defines or communicates through the specific. Science, on the other hand, defines by creating wider and wider abstraction.⁵⁶ Art makes something happen in us, in the inner part of the innermost part of our being. Art uses metaphor to summon deep archetypal knowing. Our world keeps removing places where the sacred can be accessed, paving forests and raising the secular art of consumerism to the religion of choice for many on Sunday morning. And now, the arts are being removed from our schools. Art is a door to the deep creative. When we are positioned correctly, next to that open door, God can reach in and touch us.

Paul Tillich, in A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism, observes that in the historic church there were, early on, many sacraments.⁵⁷ These included the deeds of Christ, the suffering of Christ (stations of the cross), the Gospels, symbols of the Bible, and the symbolic nature of church buildings. Added to this list is a definition, which is key for the purposes of this Rite of Passage

⁵⁵ Susan K. Langer, Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures, (New York: Scribner, 1957).

⁵⁶ Langer, 33.

⁵⁷ Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967).

project: the sacramental includes everything going on in the church. In short, a sacrament was anything in which the holy was present. Tillich goes on to tell us that in the Mediaeval church a definition of a sacrament was, “against the wounds produced by original sin, and actual sin, God has established the sacraments and remedies.”⁵⁸ Thus, the sacraments can be seen as a kind of medicine. This medical metaphor, Tillich explains, endows the action of the sacrament with actual healing powers: “the healing power through our creation of meaning in the symbol is poured into the substance or activity.”⁵⁹

Over the centuries, religion reduced the number of official sacraments. And after the Protestant Reformation, the Protestant churches reduced the number further, to two: baptism and communion. But through the centuries we also seem to have lost a sense of the Holy in our world. As sacraments become reserved for official religious ceremonial observance only, our daily lives focus on making money and on buying things with that money. As our world has become more secular, our religious observances have become, in many cases, perfunctory. So if, as Tillich suggests, a universal definition of a sacrament is “the presence of the Holy,” we are challenged to look at how to bring the Holy back into our worship through sacramental living. The symbol of the Love Feast and Lord’s Supper in the context of the Rite of Passage project then, becomes a double attribution: first, breaking the bread of forgiveness in the Love Feast as a community of difference coming together for the purpose of atonement. Secondly, we come together in the breaking of the bread of the sacrament of communion as a community of common

⁵⁸ Tillich, 155.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

purpose. In the process of sharing these two sacramental acts, we will also be creating a new sacramental act – one born out of, and through, this community.

Among groups which are pioneers in socio-drama, the Los Angeles, California-based Cornerstone Theatre Company is perhaps one of the best respected. In Staging America – Cornerstone and Community Based Theater, a book documenting their first eighteen years as a company, Sonja Kuftinec has created a scholarly, in-depth history of the company's work, their process and their struggles.⁶⁰ In conceptualizing the distinctions between performed drama and community based drama, she notes that "Mackaye refers to community drama as 'the ritual of democratic religion,' and to its motive and method as Christian neighborliness."⁶¹ A more critical view of the process comes, in the same chapter, from Hiroko Tsuchiya in commenting on the Industrial Theater Movement: "the pageantry format could be co-opted as a medium of control. But expressive diversities could also be manifested, particularly in the link between civic theater, citizenry, and nation building."⁶² The danger here would be to create a kind of idealized community epic, in which one writes a history for a community and imposes that constructed history instead of, or on top of another previous composed history. This is why the presence of dialogue and of education are essential to any community-based drama, both in the creation of and the critique and possible re-working of, the theater event.

⁶⁰ Sonja Kuftinec, Staging America – Cornerstone and Community Based Theater, (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003).

⁶¹ Kuftinec, 28.

⁶² Kuftinec, 28-29.

The history of community dramas for helping individual communities develop a shared experience of their own history is not a new one. In America, the Puritans created such dramas to encourage good citizenry. The idea is to choose a cast directly from the participating community, and to deal with a theme of some significance to their shared life.⁶³ In the history of the American theater, there has been a class differential between those who are in the profession and those who do community theater. The idea in the Cornerstone Theater community-based theater is to combine both of these worlds, using professionals and local non-professionals in a collaborative process of creation. So the construct of socio-drama is also a challenge to elitism of the professional arts community, while still incorporating its cultivated expertise. The form itself is inherently political.⁶⁴ The use of theater is a way of giving animation to the pursuit of Identity within a community context. The model of the Cornerstone company has had a significant influence on my thinking. I have experienced several of their community-based performances as an audience member/discussion participant, and have acted in one collaborative venture with the Cornerstone Theater and the Santa Monica, California-based Virginia Avenue Project. The applicability of their process to the specific circumstance of Immanuel lies not in suggesting a template or method for a pageantry in the interest of propaganda about becoming something or other, but rather in the step-by-step creation – after the fact of the denominational shift from Baptist to AME – of a shared history in which might find meaning.

⁶³ Kuftinec, 27-28.

⁶⁴ Kuftinec, 24.

We have re-visited, through a three-hour experience, the church history of the AME Church so that we might both experience and analyze together a shared look at that history.

The socio-dramatic rite of passage event can be described as a deconstruction followed by a reconstruction of the history of Immanuel Community AME Church, recognizing that history which is told from the point of view of the dominant racist culture – of the victors and not of the oppressed as well – perpetuates a lie, and is not a suitable foundation upon which to build a new, intentionally justice-oriented community of faith. So the history must be re-visited, lies and injuries acknowledged. Therefore, the presence of Native elders as we deconstruct a lie that erased their entitlement to a land upon which modern “history” has been built, is essential to “hold” the event in a sacred healing ritual space while the ancestors are contacted and acknowledged. Then through narrative, through ritual atonement, through confession of our sins, the collective ancestors – Anglo, African, and Native – are included in the present through the affirmation of the Christ intention which was part of their original intentions, even though it was obscured and profaned by misinterpretation. The “holding” in a sacred space also allows us to atone to the Natives for the decimation of their ancestral culture, while we also let go of and leave to their time in history the racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, elitism, and classism of the white founders of Immanuel. In other words, we make peace with the collective ancestors of this place before the building was constructed on appropriated land, through re-hearing the “case” of their history through the lens of the present. We also atone for the wrong thinking, destructive motives, for the sins of the founders of Immanuel, and of the racist, imperialist culture which was theirs.

This allows for us to carry forward the Christ intention, and to support our current venture in transcultural community with a reconciled relationship with our ancestors. We also seek forgiveness and salvation for them through this rite of passage. We seek forgiveness for the "sins of the fathers" so that their consequences may cease to be visited upon the third and fourth generations.

Another inspiration for assembling historical elements from the Immanuel past in a designed event in order to create a context for spiritual experience and transformation comes from the world of fine art, specifically the assemblage work of both Joseph Cornell and Betye Saar. In Joseph Cornell – Master of Dreams, author Diane Waldman presents a monograph of the reclusive Queens, New York-born artist's work that both shows in vivid photographic reproduction and narrates the "poetic theater of memory" which is Cornell's genius.⁶⁵ In her chapter "Surrealists in New York," Waldman suggests that Cornell can be seen as closely related to the surrealist movement, but observes that the lack of sophistication in the shadow boxes – filled with carefully chosen collected bits of history – which characterize Cornell's work perhaps makes his folk art more accessible to a general audience.⁶⁶ It is my experience that Cornell's work can be experienced on many levels, and that in viewing the slices of historic materials he places in juxtaposition to one another, doors to memory may open which one may not have accessed otherwise. A combination of the work of Cornell in the 1920s and the contemporary work of assemblage artist Betye Saar provides the theoretical fine arts framework for the art/ritual experience I have designed. By placing specific articles

⁶⁵ Diane Waldman, Joseph Cornell: Master of Dreams, (New York: Abrams, 2002).

⁶⁶ Waldman, 18.

from the history of Immanuel on walls, on slides, as parts of the program for the event, the article is able to be used again in a new context of worship, and so becomes something else, something transformed in that process.

In an accompanying document to one of Betye Saar's shows, as curated in part on the Internet site artsconnected.org, the artist discusses the iconography of her piece entitled The House of Ancient Memory (1989 [wood, paint, plastic, mirrors, embroidered fabric, feathers, metal, glass perfume bottles, painted and lacquered wood table] 61x 19x 13-¼ in.):

The House of Ancient Memory is one of a series of mixed-media freestanding assemblages. I have always been interested in Asia and this sculpture was inspired by the temples I saw in Taiwan, Malaysia, and Bali. It is mostly wood and painted red for good luck and prosperity. My work combines images and symbols of different cultures and religions. My materials are collected on my travels and from thrift shops and swap meets in the United States.

I attempt to create an object that suggests spirituality without pertaining to a specific religion. My goal is to show cultural differences and universal similarities.⁶⁷

This kind of creation of a space in which a journey can take place is what I have tried to create in the Immanuel church experience, with the intention of re-consecrating its church building, which had become largely a secular rental property, for the purpose of the sacred. Saar's work is mostly aimed at showing the differences and similarities among diverse religions and cultures. The Immanuel piece is designed to follow a journey of a Christian Protestant church through over eighty years of history, but the intention to show disparate kinds of worship traditions within that Immanuel context over the years in relation to one another – showing the differences in some, and the

⁶⁷ Betye Saar, The House of Ancient Memory, online, available from <http://www.artsconnected.org/artsnetmn/inner/saar.html>.

universality of other expressions – is inspired by both Saar and Cornell’s work. Saar invents her vocabulary from cultural artifacts; the Immanuel piece invents its visual vocabulary in part from historic documents from the church’s past.

In moving from the art/sociology focus into a more religious or spiritual discussion, the importance of ritual in life and in worship becomes primary. In The Sacred and the Profane, Mircea Eliade deals with the purpose of ritual in worship.⁶⁸ He discusses the process of creating “a birth place through ritual for the sacred to manifest itself to us (hierophany)”⁶⁹ as one primary role of all ritual, especially of religious ritual. From these writings, I have gleaned the idea of creating a shared space for community through ritual, and then of making the shared space accessible to the community through re-naming, holding the value of beginnings. In a sense, the re-naming in the case of Immanuel happened before the ritual event through the changing of denominations, so the event is a way to “catch up” at the level of Spirit to an action already taken. Eliade goes on, “(in ritual) people inhabit a midland between the outer chaos and the inner sacred. By consecrating a space in the profane world, cosmology is recapitulated and the sacred made accessible...a territory can be made ours only by creating it anew, that is, by consecrating it.”⁷⁰ So the Immanuel design for a Rite of Passage is a way of experiencing and participating in the sacred cosmos while re-invigorating and re-naming the profane world.

⁶⁸ Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, trans. Willard Trask, (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959).

⁶⁹ Eliade, 32.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Victor Turner, in From Ritual to Theatre – The Human Seriousness of Play,⁷¹ combines the disciplines of anthropology, performance, aesthetics and drama into a work which provides the coming together, in theory, for the work I have undertaken. Ritual and theatre are both understood to be in some way initiatory; that is, they take the participants from one place to another by going through some shared experience. Turner speaks to the experiential, “ (the participants may) ‘experience,’ through the liminal what may then become more tangible through present tense action.”⁷² Turner describes three stages to the process of a community which is consciously meeting the change that social life breeds: categories that provide usable stages for the kind of experiment in which I have engaged. The three stages are: (1) Conflict (through change); (2) Confronting the Crisis; and (3) Modes of Redress. The difference between addressing the crisis in a ritual drama or socio-dramatic way as opposed to a purely cognitive or didactic way is in the “germs of self reflexivity – of a public way of addressing our social behavior,” which moves the process of dealing with change from “the domains of law and religion into those of the various arts.”⁷³ This collective act of self reflexivity is particularly helpful in the case of a congregation which is attempting to grow beyond the point of the ritual into a new life that will include shared corporate worship, as it allows for both individual reflection and communal reflection while at the same time providing a template for further collective practice, for a shared construction of a new ritual.

⁷¹ Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play, (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982).

⁷² Turner, 17-18.

⁷³ Turner, 11.

Moving from the conceptual into models for practice within the community context, especially the urban community context, I have engaged numerous authors, but two in particular have given me validation for the thinking that has gone into the focus of my own work. Each book has also provided rich food for thought and ideas for expansion of the idea of community transformation through the arts and for community (Nathan Corbitt and Vivian Nix-Early's Taking it to the Streets – Using the Arts to Transform Your Community),⁷⁴ and healing through radical, hands-on engagement and creativity (Hearts and Hands – Creating Community in Violent Times by Luis Rodriguez).⁷⁵ Corbitt and Nix-Early have put together an exciting book of both practical and theoretical ideas and history of holistic, urban, arts-based ministry. Their work recognizes the power of the arts to provide the vehicle for social change, and for taking the gospel message to the streets in a form that communicates to an urban youth audience.⁷⁶ Using case studies of various “faith-integrated arts programs,”⁷⁷ the enthusiasm and theological underpinning in the work provide fuel for the ongoing growth into community of the Immanuel congregation beyond this Rite of Passage. The authors’ description of “urban” as a state of being or a state of mind, rather than a geographical designation, broadens the term in a way that allows the patterns of communities to be

⁷⁴ Nathan J. Corbitt and Vivian Nix-Early, Taking it to the Streets – Using the Arts to Transform Your Community, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003).

⁷⁵ Luis Rodriguez, Hearts and Hands: Creating Community in Violent Times, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).

⁷⁶ This is the first and only book I have ever found which reflects almost exactly what I am trying to do through both the arts outreach programs of Immanuel and also more particularly through this Rite of Passage into Community.

⁷⁷ Corbitt and Nix-Early, 31-33.

interpreted more easily across socio-economic lines. "Taking it to the streets emphasizes the prophetic dimension of the arts, especially as artists express themselves in a modern urban setting while fulfilling a special commitment to the poor and socially disinherited."⁷⁸

Luis Rodriguez is a brilliant, passionate man who is right on time in recognizing the emergency circumstances of the youth in our communities. Rodriguez asks, "Where do we turn when the center of culture becomes hollow?"⁷⁹ His answer turns us to the margins: to a place where creative dialogue can take place and where community-building can begin with life-affirming ritual created in concert with others in the margins of society. His former membership in, and intimate knowledge and appreciation of the culture of a gang, takes the subject of building alternatives for our youth to the heart of the matter. His sense of urgency has fueled my own passion for creating both this transition/rite of passage, and for moving into solutions after the project is completed. The power of self-expression – of art and ideas to create new people out of broken, defeated ones – is on every page of this book. Rodriguez also places the youth crisis in which we find ourselves as a nation in economic perspective, noting that a total economic shift from one mode to another – from industrial to information – has not occurred on such a broad scale since the industrial model replaced the agricultural model.⁸⁰ When viewed in this context, the teaching of skills – in both hands-on technology and also the

⁷⁸ Corbitt and Nix-Early, 10.

⁷⁹ Rodriguez, 18.

⁸⁰ Rodriguez, 58-19.

transmission of critical thinking skills and creative problem-solving skills through the arts – becomes essential.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology: a Description of the Event

Maundy Thursday: Passover Meal/Last Supper – the old traditions of the communal rite commemorating God’s covenant with his chosen people are transformed into a new symbology as Jesus uses the moments of presenting the bread and wine to bring forth additional meanings and initiates the first formal rites of his church.

On April 8, Maundy Thursday evening, the congregation of Immanuel Community AME Church will gather for a three-hour worship/theatre/rite of passage event. Preparation of participants for the event will be twofold. Most will have some previous knowledge that this is to be an academic experiment and a worship event for the doctoral project of the pastor. Those who attend and have not been briefed will enter a church lobby in which historical materials about the AME Church and of Immanuel Church are posted.

Native American elders – man and woman – sit observing entire event. One holds a drum, the other holds an eagle feather: *honoring the values instilled in the silence of the land, witnessing the atonement process of those who came later, holding the event in their wisdom.*

In the outside lobby, a sign will be posted explaining the precipitating event for the origin of the AME Church in 1787: the segregating into the balcony of St. George’s Methodist Church of church members of African descent. Prominent written notice will

also be made of the fact that in October of 2003, Immanuel Community Church made history by being the first formerly European American, now intentionally transcultural, congregation to enter the AME denomination.

Every third person to arrive, regardless of ethnicity, will be told by usher, “I am asking you to sit in the balcony”, and given a card with “OTHER” printed on it. Whether or not the person elects to actually sit in the balcony, they will have been designated as “other.”

Welcome/Reading of Narrative to clarify the purpose of the evening.

The format for the beginning of the event will be primarily educational in a socio-dramatic enactment, accompanied by periodic insertions of explanatory, contextualizing narrative by the pastor/event leader (refer to Appendix B).

Cambodian Ceremonial Dancing and Orchestra: The Blessing Song

Long Beach is home to the largest Cambodian community outside of Phnom Pen. The invocation by this group is a kind of invocation to the past from the present, summoning the future.

Worship begins with an order of worship replicated from an Immanuel bulletin of the 1930s as the format.

Opening Song: *Shall We Gather at the River*

After the singing of the opening hymn, a male minister preaches a sermon – a reading/performance excerpted from an actual sermon from the 1960s by influential Baptist minister W. A. Criswell (Appendix C) – in which racial segregation in society and in worship is affirmed, if uneasily. During the sermon, as if emerging from the land,

Native man begins to beat drum rhythmically, as if a heartbeat, underscoring the entire event. The drum beat/heartbeat throughout will function as a kind of underlying presence, punctuation and witness to the re-enactment of this history.

Images of Long Beach in the 1930s will be projected on a screen at the front of the sanctuary. Images will move into the 1940s and continue through the '50s, '60s and '70s as worship continues in the 1930s format, with all white, staid participants. As each decade and the arrival of its primary group of newer residents is represented on the visual screen, the message of the sermon will remain essentially the same, and two worshippers will be removed from the sanctuary as an example of those who left the worship community either through death or attrition.

As the drumming continues underneath the action, a woman rises from midst of the worshippers and declares that she has been called to preach. She also speaks to the idea that excluding people from the house of God is against the spirit and teachings of Jesus. A conversation/argument/business meeting begins. As the male preacher reads from the church by-laws, emphasizing law and tradition, the woman moves from the main section of the sanctuary to join the marginalized group.

Narrative about women as pastors, indicating that while women had been ordained in American Baptist and AME Churches from the early 1800s, in practice they did not pastor, nor find a leadership voice in the male- dominated worship.

The moment of conflict/catharsis is essential for any effective piece of theater; it contains the crux of the matter (literally, the “cross”). In the Christocentric context of this piece, this is the moment symbolizing the crucifixion:

A child and two parents arrive. One parent is sent to the balcony, one to the congregation below. The child asks, “Where do I sit?” Activity ceases as the question is met with silence by the worshippers below.

Teaching Moment: the worship leader lifts up the moment. A “mixed” child has entered and the neat, if oppressive, categories of “Us” and “Other” are challenged. At this point the leader invites all who have been sitting in balcony to join the main group below.

Civil rights images are projected and music continues as the marginalized worshippers are ushered into a special section of the main sanctuary area: separate but (un) equal.

Projected Images: historic pictures of Long Beach and Immanuel Baptist Church are interspersed with images of World War I, Ku Klux Klan assemblies, Ocean Boulevard and the Great Depression, Aimee Semple Macpherson, World War II, the Korean War, the Civil Rights movements, John F. Kennedy, Viet Nam War, Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy, Watts riots, Cesar Chavez, United Farm Workers, Women’s movement, Equal Rights Amendment march, Cambodian immigrants, 1992 civil unrest in Los Angeles, Rodney King, and Long Beach gay rights marches.

Good Friday: the penultimate conflict between old and new, with the forces of tradition and law seemingly conspiring to extinguish the radical, progressive message of Jesus.

As the drum beats throughout, children enter the sanctuary from four corners and pose questions in ritualized form: “What are you afraid of?”

The worship leader gathers all participants into a large circle, while describing the history of the Love Feast in the AME Church, in which worshippers gathered on Friday before communion Sunday to “get right” with their fellows. In the “old days” a ticket was issued to those who attended Love Feast which gave them access to communion on the following Sunday, hence the section in the AME liturgy which invites “all those who have made their peace with their neighbor” to “draw near in faith to the Lord’s table.”

How might we become one in Christ?

Remembering our larger purpose, to create a world for the next generations, two children will read, to the circle of adults, lists they have written which detail the qualities they seek in a mentor.

As part of the process of verbal confession, the leader will stand in the circle throughout, reading from cards on which words have been written – saying, “We seek forgiveness for:” ethnocentrism, racism, homophobia, sexism, imperialism, classism, internalized self-hatred – as a loaf of bread is passed around the circle from person to person. As participants tear off a piece of bread they say “This is the bread of forgiveness,” eat their piece of bread and pass the loaf on. Two people follow around the circle after each person has eaten. The first presents a basin of water for hand washing and the second follows with towel to dry each person’s hands after their ablution. As participants wash their hands, they say, “Wash me and make me whole.”

While the participants partake of bread and ritual cleansing, the leader reads the following: “Forgive us, for we have succumbed to fear, and in so doing have hurt other children of God. Forgive us, for we have internalized negative images of ourselves and

have hated ourselves and hurt one another. Forgive us for we have perpetuated ways of thinking which isolate us from other children of God.”

Hymn: Amazing Grace

A break of 30-45 minutes for a supper (a shared, simple, collective meal) and fellowship follows.

The first section of the event has been both an educational service and a worship that contains time for collective atonement. The context has been set for the second section: worship as a gathered community, which will include a sermon and the Lord’s Supper.

Easter Sunday: the Resurrection (Immanuel – “God with Us”) – the indisputable recognition that all has been irrevocably changed; that God can redeem the past and that a new Way is available for all who want it.

After the shared meal and fellowship time, worshippers will be ushered into sanctuary. Worship participants will process, led by children.

The music for this second section is provided by Immanuel’s Gospel/Jazz Band and by its Praise Team worship singers.

Communion (by intinction) is shared – consisting of breads from various cultures (challah/tortillas/flat bread) and grape juice – co-officiated by all ministers present.

Call to Christian Discipleship (native drum continues throughout)

Teaching Moment: the man who performed the reading of W. A. Criswell's sermon excerpts at the beginning of the event comes forward to read a later piece, in which the same minister asks for forgiveness for what he has come to understand as a perversion of the message of Jesus (Appendix C).

Native Blessing: at the culmination of the service, Native elders and ministers bless the four directions, calling on the Great Spirit for healing.

Closing

CHAPTER 5

Project Evaluation

The project will be filmed for use as an ongoing educational tool. A filmed discussion after the event will focus on developing questions that a community faced with this kind of situation may ask itself in order to heal and then to provide metaphors for shared growth in Christ toward becoming transcultural as a worship community. The development of such questions will aim at constituting a shift in consciousness of the participating group. This is a beginning, as once one has had a new idea, one can never not have had it.

Change through art must transpire at different levels of consciousness. The willingness to undergo this journey will indicate a willingness to allow a new idea to be planted in consciousness.

Follow-up Questions

A moderated group discussion and dialogue will follow the week after the event.

Questions will include:

“What has this meant to you?”

“What questions do you have now that you did not have before?”

“Can you see the possibility of a healing coming out of this ritual?”

“Can you see the body of Christ becoming a truly transcultural expression in your lifetime?”

“What impediments do you find inside yourself to allowing this evolution to transpire?”

“Has your understanding of the ministry of Jesus, an African-Asiatic Galilean Jew, changed any way due to this process?”

“What was your emotional reaction to the children reading their criteria for a mentor?”

“Do you see yourself serving as a mentor for a child in this community of faith?”

Cards will then be distributed on which participants may write what there commitment will be, if any, to furthering the transcultural community of faith at Immanuel. These will serve as pledge cards, to be followed up on by ministry team.

Findings and Interpretations

It is obvious that the learning process started by this Rite of Passage project has only just begun. It is obvious both because of the questions that are being asked within the congregation, as well as because of those questions which are not being asked. The event itself was transformational. From the beginning of the evening, when the Cambodian orchestra and dance group, which I had originally scheduled for the later part of the program, announced that they needed to be part of the beginning section due to time constraints, we had a choice. We could either hold to a rigid model of the program we had devised, or we could allow the process of the evening to lead us. We chose the latter. It was a blessing from the moment this decision was made.

The original idea represented a kind of chronological journey through the past into the present. The Cambodian influx to Long Beach has taken place over the last

thirty years. When the Immanuel Church was first organized, there were possibly no Cambodian people who had ever visited Long Beach. Now, Long Beach is home to the largest group of Cambodians outside of Phnom Pen. The Cambodian musical piece that was performed to set the stage turned out to be a “blessing song.” At the culmination of their performance, the dancers gently cast rose petals on the event participants; these floral blessings remained on the floor through out the entire Rite of Passage event. This blessing, through music and dance, provided a kind of calling to the past from the present.

Without this exact performance at this exact place in the event program, the evening itself would have been lessened. As well, we must recognize that dealing with this first event on the program was a lesson to us about the endeavor of building community. Preconceived notions are useful for planning, but only for planning. Organic growth, like the process of artistic inspiration, is unpredictable and holds to its own logic.

The event progressed mostly as planned. Participants reacted strongly to being asked to sit in the balcony. Even those who were aware of the experimental nature of the program were resistant to being labeled “other” and relegated to the balcony area. In the after-event discussion, some who had reacted strongly to being seated in the balcony (this reference is to the circumstances at St. George’s Methodist Church in Philadelphia in 1787, when members of African descent were asked to worship in the balcony, precipitating the formation of the AME Church) stated that feelings of being “less than” emerged in them when they were asked to separate from the group. Even after the leader

reminded the group about the nature of the event and the purpose of the seating experiment, some people continued to feel the sting of being declared “other.”

The move into the Love Feast part of the program represented the move from a kind of performance mode into a participatory healing mode. None of the marginalized persons were outside the circle any longer. As the loaf of forgiveness was passed, a palpable shift occurred in the room. When the basin for hand washing was offered following the loaf, a kind of sacredness entered the dynamic. Ritual is powerful. Something shifted during this section. When we broke for dinner, there was great ease and camaraderie among the participants. People sat at small tables in groups of five or six and talked animatedly. When it came time to return to the sanctuary, the participants entered the sanctuary for the second time as a unified group, not a collection of individuals.

Although not strictly planned this way, the evening fell into two sections, modes or acts. Section One (Act One) set the stage for the experience to come, presented context and goals both through narrative and performance, set in the climate of a blessing event through the invocation by the Cambodian dance group and orchestra. A distinct shift came when the attendees moved from the role of observer into active participation in the Love Feast. During this transition, the evening became worship. After the dinner break, we had journeyed together and were in need of “a Word from the Lord.” We alone of our new creation could not carry the evening further. The event began to carry us. After the sermon was preached and before the sharing of the Lord's Supper, I put forth the Call to Christian Discipleship. This moment could have been a kind of pro forma acting out of a worship event. It was, however, something very different from

that. A young man came forward, someone I had never seen before, a young Latino who had been sitting through the entire event with his girlfriend. The aspect of transformation was both heightened and affirmed at this point. If there had been any question about whether or not we had achieved a worship mode, this young man's heartfelt and urgent response to the Call answered our question. The sharing of the Lord's Supper followed. The end of the event was blessed by Ben Wolf, a Choctaw Elder. When invited, every participant came forward to receive a smudging and blessing.

I was aware throughout the event of being observed. Who was I? Why was I leading this action? Where was I taking them? Would they be safe? It was not enough for the group to hear that the origin of the Rite of Passage was a search for the development of a community that might provide mentors for the youth. I am reminded here of the idea that one must work on one's self in order to be an effective agent of change. As the leader of this journey – back to the past, into the present, and toward a re-imagined future – the burden was on me to “hold” the process for the participants. There is a shamanic nature in the leading of such an event into spiritual transformation. One who aspires to replicate such an event must be aware of the need for the leader to be grounded in Spirit, as the energies which move during such a transformation process are significant.

When the two children read their lists of qualities they would envision in a mentor, certain people in the circle became extremely uncomfortable. Since that event, I have continued to reflect upon the possible nature of the discomfort, and have realized that many who come to a church community are looking to be taken care of, to be “nursed” by the community. This is fine, and must be part of the fellowship of any

Christian church; however, the challenge in a church body such as Immanuel, which has been diminished in both size and purpose over the years, is to find some responsible adults who are willing to take a leap of faith and form a committed, consistent core group. Without such a group, inordinate pressure falls on the Pastor to be all things to all people, and no real community can take root. Whether or not Immanuel will be able to develop this kind of core group remains to be seen.

After the events of Maundy Thursday, however, and after our community discussion one week later, there are already signs that something major has changed. There is more of a relaxed feeling among those who participated in the event – less tentativeness, more ownership and sense of place. A support for this emerging sense of a collective self will be in our affiliation with the larger AME denominational body, which provides the extended family to “parent” this beginning of life into something viable. I am, of course, the guide into the shared experience, but also have made it clear that this journey is to be the beginning of a continued walk for them: led by them, owned by them, taught through them to future generations.

In the follow-up discussion, the group was asked how they felt when the children read their list of criteria for mentoring. One person commented that the youth were “calling out for us.” Another person expressed a desire for the children to be supported into “becoming those things for themselves.” Discussion group participants reflected back what they had heard the children say, but expressed a decided discomfort about what their response might be in return. This finding confirms the initial diagnosis. There is not a group that really wants to or feels equipped to take responsibility for the leadership of the future generation ... yet.

In discussing the race issues that people confront in becoming part of a community which spans cultures, people were very honest and a fair amount of pain was expressed. One woman, who had not attended the event but did attend the follow-up discussion, expressed her struggle to explain to her AME relatives why she chooses to be part of a new AME church with a White woman pastor. She observed that, with the history of oppression in the Black community, the fact that a White woman is carrying on the AME tradition to a multicultural congregation touches difficult places in her when she least expects it. This, she explains, is in spite of the fact that she loves the pastor, the worship and the community of faith. Since the follow-up group discussion, however, both she and her teenage son have officially joined the church.

Another discussion participant, an 82-year-old White woman who has been a member of Immanuel for twenty years, then stated that people have asked her, “You mean you admit to being an AME?” A gay man shared that this is the first time he and his life partner of 27 years have been able to attend church together, as a couple. I asked if the idea of being somehow “other” is perhaps central to investing in a transcultural community such as this one. This idea seemed to meet with approval. Perhaps the purpose of this community is this kind of delving into the subtexts of separateness out of which we have been operating, both in society and in the Christian church, for much of their histories. Perhaps the legacy we at Immanuel will leave to our children is the experience of a community that struggles to find the answers to, or at least to ask the questions about difficult subjects that have historically separated us from one another. Perhaps one of the most moving reflections upon the Rite of Passage event came at the

end of the actual Rite of Passage evening. A man in his 50s said simply, “Tonight, we have washed the footprint of Immanuel.”

In terms of the actual Rite of Passage event, the result thus far seems to have created a context in which people feel they can talk about their questions and honestly express their fears about getting to know others who are not from their same cultural background in a close way. Questions have been framed and ideas have been put forward. After the actual rite of passage event, a kind of euphoria seemed to permeate the church and the worship community. After the discussion of the questions that arose through participation in the event, a kind of melancholy has been added to the mix.

One elderly white woman who had been very much a part of the congregation, the board and the legal process, who voted in the affirmative to become an A.M.E. Church, chose not to attend the rite of passage event and has mostly stopped attending the church. This is both sad and clarifying. She is not willing to say that she feels a deep discomfort with being in a worship community that is part of a larger denominational structure led by African Americans. Her actions and comments as she tries to understand her own reaction to what must feel like a loss of control would indicate that this is an issue for her. But the larger issue, which is no doubt true for some older people in many such situations, is that she is likely experiencing longing for a time which is no longer. She is longing for a world in which her identity in relation to her world and her worship community was more easily defined. We have kept in touch with this member, have continued to tell her that we love her and hope to see her back soon. It is unclear what she will decide to do. She is in pain and this causes pain for those of us who love her. But she is also unwilling to investigate what being a new kind of worship community might

be like. She is choosing to define herself as “other.” The truth is that there is a feeling of living in a kind of matrix of creation within the group which has participated in this rite of passage – a sense of joy and of being engaged in a collective journey toward self discovery, which may leave her feeling more out of the loop if she does return to the church and is expecting to find the same place she left. The fact is that due to the rite of passage event, a significant shift has taken place in a short time. We have in a very real sense, time traveled as a group. So there have been both gains and losses and definite clarifications as the direct result of the rite of passage process. The journey is taking us someplace new.

In looking for support for the kind of ministry we are attempting to do at Immanuel, I have been fortunate enough to find the writing of Curtiss Paul DeYoung, professor at Bethel Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota and former President of TURN (Twin Cities Urban Reconciliation Network), a metropolitan ministry that serves as a catalyst for reconciliation and social justice in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Finding DeYoung’s work was a godsend, as the overwhelming rush of cultural baggage that has bombarded the participants in the Immanuel event after the fact has given me a real sense of the depth of commitment required to “stand” as a kind of neutral zone for many people’s projections to bounce into and off of.

Acknowledgement of historic issues raises current issues, which raise other, deeper issues, and it goes on. Through the work of Miroslav Volf, we have determined that a ministry of reconciliation is the only possible model for a transcultural model of Christocentric worship. DeYoung, in Reconciliation: Our Greatest Challenge, Our Only

Hope,⁸¹ takes this idea a step further, suggesting that the late Samuel Hines, a great urban pastor, was correct in claiming that a ministry of reconciliation is the only valid ministry period – that such a ministry represents “God’s one-item agenda:”

Hines’ audacious declaration was based on his study of the Bible, particularly Paul’s eloquent articulation of the meaning of Jesus Christ’s ministry in 2 Corinthians 5: 17-20:

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”⁸²

This affirmation has the power to turn what could be seen (in light of what Christianity has become) as a burn-out endeavor into a dynamic reclaiming of the real point and purpose of the life ministry, of the death and the resurrection of Jesus: reconciliation. In reconciliation lies the key for creating the kind of strength for the journey required to make the long walk into the light. Rather than view the kind of discussions taking place across cultural lines at Immanuel as the result of the Rite of Passage event and the prelude to something really viable, the process of the discussions themselves and of the creation of a reconciling community may be seen to be the main action. Even the fact of being available for such dialogue in the context of this community, which also has children in its midst, can be seen as a model for the mentoring we strive to provide. We are developing a model for transcultural reconciliation and literacy within the context of a Christocentric worship community.

⁸¹ Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Reconciliation: Our Greatest Challenge, Our Only Hope, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1997).

⁸² DeYoung, 44.

Again using the early church as a model, DeYoung reminds us that in the ancient Near East, “Jews, Greeks, Romans, Africans, Asians, Samaritans and others were finding common ground in the faith of Jesus.”⁸³ Restoring the Christian community to an accurate model of reconciliation in the Early Church places us firmly in the tradition of building bridges between those who have been traditionally estranged. DeYoung quotes Biblical scholar Craig S. Keener in noting that the [early] Christians “formed the only bridge between the Jews and the Gentiles and had few allies in challenging class (slave vs. free) and gender prejudices” and goes on to observe that “part of living in a reconciled community is the ability to live in the tension.”⁸⁴ This idea of tolerating tension between different points of view is, of course, one of the lessons of education. Black and white thinking creates easier rules of engagement, clearer definitions of right and wrong and provides an easy banner behind which to rally. But the tension of living in the questions, rather than in someone else’s answers, also creates life, allowing for the possibility of reconciliation.

Almost fifteen years ago, when I found myself to be called into the AME church – a community of faith where I recognized the living Jesus of the Oppressed, even amidst the trappings of a theological system that seemed similar to the one in which I had been raised (the White United Presbyterian Church) – I had one question: “what is different here?” “Why have I rejected the organized form of Christianity in which I was raised, but found new life in Jesus in this community of faith?” Through years of study and experience, through years of struggling to become cross-culturally literate, through years

⁸³ DeYoung, 128.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

of intentionally placing myself in the position of “other” as I matriculated through ministry classes in the AME church as the only non-African American student in my class, I have searched for the deeper understanding of why one form of Christianity is living for me and one is oppressive. Something in me has refused to stop searching, even in the face of social ostracism from both White friends and from many in the Black community of which I was becoming part. Through my ordination process and through several years of ministry, the study has deepened and I have looked into the African roots of Black Christianity in depth to find some answers.

Through this Rite of Passage, I have found the key. Howard Thurman’s “religion of Jesus”⁸⁵ IS different from the White racist Protestantism of the dominant culture. The myth of a blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus who, as mis-translated through interpretations of the writings of Paul, supports top-heavy systems of social oppression that brought us chattel slavery, corporate greed, the prison industrial complex, preemptive imperialistic wars against those with rich resources but little economic power – this construct is a lie. This myth has been used to defend White privilege and to maintain a system of sexism, classism and racism in the name of Jesus, but Jesus in that context is a mere construct. This Jesus is not the Afro-Asiatic Galilean Jew who preached and taught and lived reconciliation and who was a political prisoner because of his radical challenge of the same status quo that has co-opted his name today. Fundamental to the question of becoming one in Christ, in a Jesus-centered community, is the question, “Which Jesus?”

Assimilating one ethnic or cultural group into one predominant view is not transcultural community-building: it is erasing one or another’s expression of

⁸⁵ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 15.

authenticity and replacing it with a dominant form of some kind. Transcultural community-building in Christ, then, relies upon a clear-eyed embracing of the common denominator, of Jesus of Nazareth: of his life lessons, of his cross and of his radical call to love one another and to tear down systems of oppression in order to make way for life.

Questions, rather than answers, will open the way to finding one another across culture in Christ. Questions – about why someone dresses or acts or sings or worships or eats a certain way – hold the potential to open doors. Fear dictates the imposition of answers. For those who have benefited from the White privilege that has been reinforced in the racist White church, a “letting-go” must transpire before there can be reconciliation. Recognizing that one has benefited from the systemic oppression of others is painful, and the journey is not for the faint of heart. It takes tremendous courage to relinquish a sense of entitlement born in the misappropriation of the radical Jesus into a front man for oppression.

Civil rights activist Calvin Morris asserts that:

Racist faith, that belief system which invests ultimate meaning in the biology of white skin color, has permeated American history from its beginning

The founders of this nation faced a dilemma posed by the conflict between freedom and slavery. A people proclaiming as the bedrock of their political existence the concept of human liberty as a natural endowment given by God nonetheless held others in chains. Thus, the United States was founded upon political and moral ambiguities so profound that its characterization of itself as a land of freedom and human liberty has to it the sound of hypocrisy.⁸⁶

Opening one's mind to realizing the truth of this profound divide places those who have benefited from the system of oppression at risk of experiencing profound grief, anger and defensiveness. Immanuel, as a community of those who have known

⁸⁶ DeYoung, 34.

oppression through poverty, homophobia, sexism or ableism, is perhaps is the ideal kind of place where such a dialogue may begin. But the journey will require, as the fare for its undertaking, a willingness to look honestly at historic White privilege as a starting point.

Those in the communities of the traditionally oppressed – by racism, sexism, homophobia, classism – who would engage in such a ministry of reconciliation are also challenged, at a deep level, to come out of the safer but separate identity of the underdog in order to grapple with anger and resentment: with the fury of being oppressed in the name of Jesus, with the rage of being defined as “other” in their world. African American studies professor Catherine Meeks gives voice to that rage:

We hate you because we have not begun to forgive you or your ancestors for their enslavement of our ancestors; nor have we forgiven you for today’s oppression of us, which comes primarily from the system that you protect and rule

As long as we talk about reconciliation without acknowledging our very real and legitimate rage, we are trying to have a manipulated reconciliation . . . It is not enough to say that you didn’t have anything to do with slavery and that you don’t feel guilty about it. Perhaps you don’t have a sense of guilt, but blacks and whites share a collective history, and just as blacks have to deal with slavery, so do whites.

As a white person you are a partner in the oppression which your foreparents created. The denial of this partnership has created a lot of pseudo-relating between whites and blacks. This type of pseudo-relating comes across as patronizing liberalism, and the world is not in need of more patronizing liberals. The denial of the feelings around this issue on the part of whites simply adds fuel to the fires of mistrust and deepens the wounds of both races.⁸⁷

We have not undertaken an easy challenge at Immanuel. Engaging in a transcultural Christocentric community necessitates nothing less than radical self-denial in the interest of opening access to the Kingdom of God. Recognizing that there is no

⁸⁷ DeYoung, 25-26.

stable adult community established at Immanuel to mentor its youth can be seen as the tip of a very big, culturally-entrenched iceberg. God has called us to a ministry of reconciliation, in which we will necessarily be led to create options for our youth with no roadmap other than the sacrificial teachings of the Afro-Asiatic Galilean Jewish Jesus of Nazareth.

Epilogue

As we turn to the future, the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, author of The Cost of Discipleship and ultimate victim of the Nazis in WW II, provides a template for a community of reconciliation:

Two years after Dietrich Bonhoeffer published his book The Cost of Discipleship, he left Germany intent on spending a year or so in the United States. Bonhoeffer's purpose for the trip was to communicate with Christians outside of Germany, to tell the real story of the danger posed by the Nazi's. He also would teach, reflect, and rest while in the United States. But Bonhoeffer began to have second thoughts in the final days before he left. Church leaders in Germany were continuing to bow to the demands of the Nazi government, and many were stating their support for Hitler's policies. These church leaders proclaimed that they would commit "to join fully and devotedly in the Fuhrer's national political constructive work In the national sphere of life there must be a serious and responsible racial policy of maintaining the purity of the nation."⁸⁸

Despite his concerns, Bonhoeffer left for the United States, but recognized upon his arrival that he could not be a witness from afar to the atrocities being committed in the name of Jesus in his home country. So he returned. "In a letter to Reinhold Niebuhr he explained his decision to return to Germany,

⁸⁸ DeYoung, 170, quoting Edwin Robertson, The Shame and the Sacrifice: The Life and Martyrdom of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, (New York: Macmillan. 1998).

I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.’⁸⁹

In 1987, I chose to leave my home of eighteen years, New York City. In part, I moved because I could not face the ongoing process of many of my friends dying from AIDS. I was having difficulty supporting myself in the theater, my profession, and could not find my way through the grief and hardship of the epidemic that was infecting my colleagues and friends so that I could make a living and also be of some support to them. I moved to California, where I was able to start a new stage of my career by doing television. But I was carrying terrible grief and guilt for having left my friends behind to face death. And then another crisis of conscience came into my life. Los Angeles erupted into race/class warfare in 1992 and I recognized that I was living in Long Beach, where racism was alive and well. My friends were dying in New York. My grandmother died at age 101. My world seemed to be falling apart. I volunteered to work in hospice, in part to find a place to process my own grief, and soon found myself joining First AME Church in Los Angeles, as well. Through this journey, I have left one career, accepted a calling to ministry, and found myself in the middle of a conflict as challenging as the one I ran from in New York in 1987. But, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I also recognize that for some reason God has called me to “stand” in the face of oppression and to be a force for reconciliation. When I ask God why I am called to stand in the gap, the answer that comes to me is, “Because you can.”

Ultimately, through the Immanuel Rite of Passage we have opened the door to a way of being human: an authenticity of being fully who we are, which calls us to rise to

⁸⁹ DeYoung, 172, quoting Robertson.

the challenge of becoming, in the words of DeYoung, “artisans of reconciliation,”⁹⁰ walking through our own brokenness to step up to the challenge of leadership in Jesus of Nazareth. I would like to move to a comfort zone. I long to find some calling other than this one to which I have been called. Self-doubt plagues this path, as one is leading others in this journey to the cross, as well. But the voices of the ancestors – Native American, Scots-Irish, African, Baptist, AME, Cambodian, Mexican, German, Chilean, Jewish and Greek, who have moved on to glory where the truth of our oneness must be known as all that is real – continue to call across the expanse of time asking, “If not you, whom? And if not now, when?”

So by committing to a ministry of reconciliation, based on social justice, on truth-telling about our past, and honest engagement with issues of institutionalized inequality, we allow for the potential in each person to heal from the distortions that are caused by oppression. In this reconciling climate, in this striving to nurture the development of the most authentic agents of social change, each person’s individual brilliance may emerge – and along with that brilliance, their unique contribution to the creation of the Kingdom:

There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is; nor how valuable it is, nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours, clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep open and aware directly to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open. No artist is pleased There is no satisfaction whatever at any time. There is only a queer, divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than the others.⁹¹

⁹⁰ DeYoung, 137.

⁹¹ Agnes DeMille, Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham, (New York: Random House, 1991), quoting a personal letter from Martha Graham.

My nephew William, when he was under five years old, greeted my 97-year-old grandmother at the door of his home in Portland. She was arriving there after we had been forced to move her out of her lifelong home in St. Louis, Missouri to be closer to family who could care for her. She was confused and deeply grieving. Willie took her hand and led her into the living room, lovingly comforting her with, "Don't worry, Grandma, it isn't real." William is a gifted child: gifted with the fruits of the Spirit. He saw then what we affirm through our cleaning of the footprint of the past of Immanuel Church to make way for a new day: that in the eyes of God, our sins atoned for, all that exists IS God.

In memory of, and with gratitude to, Brad O'Hare

APPENDIX A

Order of Worship

Claiming the Past
Embracing the Present
Moving into the Future

An Interfaith Worship and Rite of Passage

April 8, 2004 – 7 p.m.

⌘ = all who are able, please stand

INVOCATION Cambodian Dancers

WELCOME Pastor Jane Galloway

PROCESSIONAL

OPENING SONG *SHALL WE GATHER AT THE RIVER*

SERMON Rev. J. R. Boyer
(from the historic sermons and writings of Rev. W. A. Criswell)

INTERRUPTION

MEETING

INTERRUPTION

FORMATION OF NEW MARGINAL WORSHIP COMMUNITY

THE CHILDREN

ATONEMENT

All: To atone: to become reconciled. From Middle English “At One” or “In Harmony.” A transitive verb. An action thing.

EXPLANATION OF THE LOVE FEAST Pastor Jane Galloway

(please move into a circle)

LOVE FEAST AND WASHING OF HANDS

HYMN

AMAZING GRACE
(led responsively)

BREAK

Dinner will be served in Cassidy Hall

SERMONIC SELECTION

Immanuel Music Department

SERMON

Pastor Jane Galloway

"The Last Supper – a First Communion"

Exodus 12:1-28

OFFERING

"All you have shall some day be given. Therefore give now, that the season of giving may be yours and not your inheritors."

Kahlil Gibran – "The Prophet"

"THANK YOU, LORD"

✱ THE LITANY

Minister: I am a part of the fellowship of the unashamed, I have Holy Ghost power; the die has been cast, I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made; I am a disciple of Jesus Christ! I won't look back, let up, back up, or be still!

People: My past is redeemed. My present makes sense. My future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals!

Minister: I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, plaudits, or popularity! I do not have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on the Lord, run with patience, lift by prayer, and labor by Holy Ghost Power.

People: My face is set. My goal is heaven. My road is narrow. My way is rough. My companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed!

Minister: I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

People: **I WON'T GIVE UP, SHUT UP, LET UP until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, worked up, for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, teach till all know, and work till He stops me. And when Jesus comes, He will have no problems recognizing me because He'll remember I was the one he gave POWER!**

✠ COMMUNION

HYMN *ALL TO JESUS I SURRENDER (I SURRENDER ALL)*

POSTLUDE

APPENDIX B

Worship Leader's Narrative

Reasons for the Project/Goals of the Project

Narrative to be read at beginning of the worship event by the worship leader:

Long Beach, California was a tent meeting revival town during the two Great Awakenings at the turn of the last century. The scope of my graduate work has encompassed a study of the spiritual roots in Africa of the Black Church tradition, an investigation of the period of the two Great Awakenings when white Protestantism and Africanisms came together in camp meetings to cross-pollinate into the form we know as American Black Christianity, and a study of how best to use the depth traditions of the art and worship form known as the Black Church to bring cross-cultural engagement in worship and community.

Immanuel Community AME Church was founded as Immanuel Baptist Church in 1913. The church moved to its current location in 1922. During the many years which have passed from that time to the present, the church has maintained its original identity as a conservative Baptist group which was formed when Long Beach was called "Iowa-by-the-Sea" due to the overwhelmingly majority group of white Midwesterners who settled the city. Outside the walls of the church, Long Beach was becoming "The Most Multicultural City in the US" (2000 Census).

When I was called to pastor the Immanuel Congregation, membership had shrunk to fewer than ten active members. In 1935 there were 600 active members. I was

called to revive ministry. In the course of this enterprise, basic assumptions about identity have had to be addressed.

In 2003, Immanuel made history by becoming the first mostly European American congregation to join the AME Church. As a white AME minister and as a theatre artist, we have employed many cross-cultural educational and artistic techniques in our ministry over the period of transition.

The idea for a rite of passage experience for the whole worship community (now numbering 50 active, multicultural members) as the practicum for my D. Min. project grew out of the process of narrowing a larger initial education event of six weeks, in which diverse viewpoints toward worship could be taught and experienced, into something with a more specific focus. In so doing, I discovered that the primary concern I was experiencing as a pastor related to why the multicultural group of 11-14 year old children who have come to our formerly all-adult, all-white church have not been able to find a dynamic, nurturing home at Immanuel, in spite of our efforts to provide Sunday School, Vacation Bible School and Youth Choir for them. I began to conceptualize a rite of passage into a transcultural community for this group of youth, and in so doing quickly realized that the problem rested in the commitment of the adult members of Immanuel to a shared view of community in Christ. In other words, there was no community into which we might welcome the youth once they had completed a rite of passage.

Consequently, I have developed a rite of passage for the entire community from a mono-cultural model into a transcultural one in order to prepare the soil for a stability into which young people might join.

Artists look at subtext. I am an artist. Jesus teaches through story. We are in need of finding a thread through the narrative of the Immanuel's past which can link us to the Immanuel of the future by first consciously addressing the woundings of the present: woundings we have afflicted – knowingly and unknowingly – upon one another.

Using the metaphor of the Passion week and Resurrection, I have designed an art/worship event which will elucidate a collective awareness of our brokenness , a process of at least looking at the negative effects of ethnocentrism and isolationism on the next generations, a shared liturgical process of reconciliation in Christ and a view of what a consciously transcultural, Christocentric worship community might feel like.

The use of the embodied worship of the Black Church, using elements of embodied, kinesthetic worship, song, story, and what may be thought of as a kind of “conjure” through trance, chant, celebration, as a context in which such a new Christian worship model might evolve, and the recognition of the presence – as conscience, as observer – of the Native peoples on whose ancestral land this conflict is played out, provide the methodology for this evening of theatre/ catharsis/worship/crucifixion of the old mono-cultural, Euro-centric paradigm.

The purpose of this event is to draw out, through ritual/sociodrama, the essential energies of the past – to extract meaning from the past by ritually enacting a flow of history. This process is designed to summon the energies of the ancestors and to befriend those energies, enlisting their support in the making of a solid new community of purpose for this time and for the next generations. This event is designed to educate about the past, to atone for past and present harm caused through ethnocentrism, fear, ignorance, inaccurate education, and to re-sacralize the existing building of Immanuel

Community AME Church for the purpose of spreading the love of the Christ consciousness. We ask the forgiveness of the Native elders for stealing this land from them, and seek to acknowledge this wound through atonement; we seek a shared place, through ritual, where we might incorporate the wisdom of the Native ancestors in the healing and visioning for the Long Beach of the next seven generations.

In order to honor the ancestors, it is necessary to acknowledge and affirm the Christ intention from the founders of Immanuel, while releasing the racism, ethnocentrism and elitism from that mix. The Christ consciousness will provide the common thread from 1922 to the present, upon which we may build in a spirit of love, in spite of the fact that certain cultural assumptions and race prejudices of the original congregation of Immanuel would have been dramatically different from those of the present church.

But to simply state the continuum in Christ is not enough. It is our intention to forge an energetic pathway through which the Christ presence may travel. Some current members of Immanuel have lived through past eras at the church. Most are relatively new members. A shared, embodied, kinesthetic experience allows the entire participating group to make a ritualized journey through history together.

Because art is a process which can be destroyed by too much analysis, especially before the execution of the art project, there is an uneasy alliance in this project between the process of art and the process of academic inquiry.

The goal of this project is to make real through shared, embodied participation, the journey of Christ in our life as a church community at Immanuel, asking the question,

“how does the life within the walls of the church respond to the world outside the walls in which we live NOW?” – with a primary focus on creating a different, more inclusive world for our next generations.

APPENDIX C

From the Historic Sermons and Writings of W. A. Criswell

W. A. Criswell, whose influence on the Southern Baptist Church continues after his death, left behind a large body of work. The sermon presented here has been prepared from excerpts from his sermons, his books and his public speaking, as detailed in the bibliography. While the words “Negro” and “colored folks” have been softened to references to “those people, and “those folks,” the essential message of separation presented is unaltered. It is worth noting that the words with which Criswell later repudiated racism are unchanged.

Sermon

I want to talk to you today about a problem in this neighborhood. Let's turn to Matthew 22:21: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Now, that's a passage that some people say is about separation of church and state, but don't be confused: the notion of separation between church and state was the figment of some infidel's imagination.

And some of these infidels today want to join our churches. I call them infidels because the word means “unfaithful.” And don't be mistaken: if these people were faithful to the Word of God, they'd know that we cannot mix with people who are under the curse of Ham. The Bible tells us so. Only an infidel would think that we can mix with them in all social matters.

We frequently hear discussions concerning whether the Bible is the Word of God or only contains the word of God. If, by the former, it is meant that God spoke every word in the Bible, the answer, of course, is not. But if it is meant that God caused every word in the Bible ... the answer is yes.

Growing up I heard the great expositors of the Word of God and not a one of them ever questioned the infallibility of the Bible. We have pastors and teachers who question the Word and I don't understand it. Our calling is to be a forceful minister of the Word of God. Any church that has a pastor who has any doubt about the Word has a dying church. Any pastor who gives himself to preaching the inerrant Word of God has a growing and ministering church.

If our preachers, churches and institutions are true to the infallibility of Scripture we shall live. If we repudiate it, we shall die. Theological liberalism that denies the Word of God has destroyed other churches; the same theological liberalism will destroy us. There is no exception in this judgment, whether in individual congregations or in denominational associations. No minister who has embraced a higher critical approach to the gospel has ever built a great church; held a mighty revival or won a city to the Lord.

Now, some people say that we should embrace everyone because we live in a democracy. But one of the glories of a democratic society is that we can choose our friends, we can choose our companions, we can choose the mates that share with us the building of our homes. We can choose our lives. It's a free country. It's a free nation and that thing of ... they don't like the word segregation -- but call it that ... that thing

enters all of the realms of our lives and there is no escaping from it if a man has the liberty of choice.

I just can't sing like those folks sing. And my folks can't do it and my choir can't do it. If I'd tell them to sing songs like that for me, why you'd never hear such sorry singing in your life. They can't do it. But those folks can do it over there at their church. They've got lots of things over there. I've never seen one of our preachers in my life preach like one of their preachers. But it is better for them to be over there in their way, in their church, with their preacher, carrying on like they do, and then I'm over here with my flock and my kind and we are carrying on like we want to do. And everything is just fine.

If you want this group, or that group, or that group, or that group, brother, it's a free country. If I want my group, let me have it. Let me have it. Don't force me by law, by statute, by Supreme Court decision, by any way that they can think of, don't force me to cross over in those intimate things where I don't want to go. Let me build my life. Let me have my church. Let me have my school. Let me have my friends. Let me have my home. Let me have my family. And what you give to me, give to every man in America and keep it like our glorious forefathers made it -- a land of the free and the home of the brave.

Repentance and Repudiation of Racism

I bare my personal soul to you. I cannot describe and I have come to feel the weight of it and the burden of it. I cannot describe to you how I feel when I preach the gospel of the Son of God and call men to faith and to repentance, and then stand there

afraid that somebody might respond who has a different pigment from mine. It is though I were living in denial of the faith, to preach and be afraid that somebody might respond. What if there came down the aisle a child of a different color? How would I explain to that child? In ten thousand years I couldn't explain to that child, I couldn't do it. But that's not so much the point, how can I explain to God? You tell me how. You give me the words. What do I return to say to God? What would I say?

To separate by coercion the body of Christ on any basis is unthinkable, unchristian, and unacceptable to God.

Racism was, is, and always will be an abomination in the eyes of God, and should be in the eyes of God's people ... we have sinned and need to beg God's forgiveness ...

APPENDIX D

H'artWorks Mission Statement

H'artWorks, Inc. is a 501(c)3 arts and human services agency providing social services, recreational activities, and community and neighborhood development, grounded in and guided by creative artistic free expression, to the diverse community of children and families served by or near Horace Mann Elementary School in Long Beach, California.

VALUES

The following core values are the arteries that feed the heart, the beat of the community, and help H'artWorks encourage creative expression through visual arts, music, dance, theatre, and spoken word.

Freedom

We want to foster and nurture creativity in everyone we meet, and provide structured (and unstructured) spaces in which they may express their passions, fears, and creativity in a variety of forms.

Diversity

We care about the citizens of Long Beach and the multiplicity of different cultures that thrive.

Community Empowerment

We encourage community dialogues and engagement. We encourage communities to rise above racial and other divisions and instead listen and grow. We also hope to provide a range of human services, such as support groups, yoga, after-school tutoring, youth leadership development, parenting skills, and recreational activities. To best serve our clientele, we will survey community needs and respond to changes in our social and economic environments.

Respect

We will provide a safe space for people to explore their potential as caring, wonderful persons and seek to assist individuals, while serving the broader surrounding community. Cooperative relationships with other talent in the community and with other communities are welcomed. Everyone will be respected and encouraged to be innovative.

APPENDIX E

A Passage Into Community – Claiming the Past, Embracing the Present

By Kathryn Reuter, Office Administrator/Grant Writer of The Children's Collective, Inc.

Being witness to a journey others are daring to take could seem isolating, alienating, strange. Not so in the this case of the unfolding of the journey of the congregation of Immanuel Community African Methodist (AME) Episcopal Church from its previous incarnation as Immanuel Baptist Church, invoking arts, AME black theological construct in lived reality, community building, and healing. I was a witness on April 8, 2004, to an incredible transformational socio-dramatic pilgrimage from fear to healing, from silence to speech, from paralysis to embodiment, from oppression to community-building. Art is the vehicle for the building and nurturing of this sacred community, and the nurturing of the community into parents, mentors, friends, leaders, teachers, and artists. The original idea of a rite of passage transformed a passage into a community. Promise can be seen in the children of the community, and the gem of this community's task is to help create a community into which Immanuel children can enter and be lifted up, supported, taught, listened to, hugged, and become strong, creative, and faith-filled adults in a Beloved Community.

Rev. Jane Stormont Galloway carefully explained her intent of the journey upon which we were about to embark – a Passage into Community – engaging her theological education at Claremont School of Theology, biblical reflection, her participation with the black community and the rich AME theological tradition, and her passion of the arts to communicate and learn through worship, prayer, and religious practice. The event shared

the talents and passions of many members of the Long Beach community, including the watchful presence of a Native American elder, the music and dancing of members of the Long Beach Cambodian community, and smudging, prayers, and singing from Native-Christian traditions. The day of this event, Maundy Thursday, is significant as it marks the tradition in the Christian Church of suffering, death, and new life springing forward, deeply transforming entire communities in the journey. This transformation has happened, and will continue to happen for Immanuel AME Church as the Immanuel community continues to participate in interactive, experiential, reflective community transformation.

This interactive experience initiated some participants firsthand into the experience of otherness right away when 1/3 of the audience was asked to sit upstairs in the balcony, distinctly separate from and out of view of the body of participants below. I, however, sat down below with the majority of the congregation. This exercise, as was explained in the context of the event, was indicative of the history of the church – a Eurocentric, Baptist congregation that did not condone interracial interaction. This *entrée* was meant to convey the roots of the church and the legacy out of which the current community has developed and evolved and acknowledge experiences of racism which may not be completely exorcised from the tradition. Participants were asked to leave the sanctuary and look at pictures posted on the wall of the church's past. They then re-entered the space (some still only to the balcony) and heard the re-enactment of an actual sermon from the 1950s at the church, accompanied by overhead photos from the time, exposing the specific historical and biblical context of the time period in the church. During the sermon, congregants stood up to challenge patriarchal and exclusionary

messages in the sermon, and were quickly silenced. Children asked if there was a place for them; there was not. This socio-drama signified the theological and historical context from which the church had come, Christocentric and Eurocentric, and signaled to new members the history of the church and the pain it caused to members, while lifting up the struggle to remain true to the promise of God's word for people. The drama revealed why it was so important to construct a community of healing, openness, and engagement with all people as they worship in Christ and share a faith that views God as relational: barriers break down, dialogue happens, and the community finds strength in its numbers and its hopes.

In following the path of this very important theological journey, Rev. Galloway next explained that in early Christian communities, part of the significance of sharing in communion was the development of a community in faith and in service to one another. People who wanted to participate in this communion were encouraged to "make things right" with anyone whom they had judged or hurt before they could partake in communion. Part of the Love Feast, as it was known, was mending broken relationships or misdeeds before partaking in a community-building sacred ceremony. On April 8, 2004, the community also participated in a Love Feast at Immanuel AME, sharing a meal with each other in the foyer and then returning to the sanctuary to participate in a circle of forgiveness, atoning for sexism, racism, homophobia, and prejudice, in which we shared bread and wine with our neighbor.

Part of the community building that is so critical for Immanuel is building a community into which youth can be mentored and nurtured. At this time, voices of hope and promise were lifted up as two Immanuel youth shared their ideal qualities in a

mentor: understanding, listening, sharing of experiences, and nurturing. There could be no greater task of this event – to manifest a transformational community where multicultural worship can take place that will help support youth as they grow and nurture the rest of the community.

As Rev. Galloway has articulated, the challenge of the event and for this budding community is how to create a transcultural theological worship space that represents the communities of Long Beach, honor a worship community that can speak to the values of the Christian tradition, and that can use the arts to nurture youth and community in their development. Bringing all of these pieces together is no easy task, and surely the mere presence of these ingredients does not guarantee a positive environment for healing and change. The intentional working together of Christ-centered reflection, honest cultural expression, and intentional dialogue about community and social change all plant the seeds for fruitful dialogue and encourage constant reevaluation and interpretation of the matrix of the history of who the church has been and visions of who the church is becoming. The challenge will be answered over time as the congregation responds to the opportunity for healing and growth and becomes the Beloved Community, embodied at Immanuel AME Church as it authors its own future.

APPENDIX F

Long Beach, California Demographics

The following statistics are taken from the U.S. Census of 2000, as presented by the National Coalition for Community and Justice Long Beach branch at a symposium presented July 1, 2001 at Long Beach City College:

One America: Building Inclusive Institutions

Long Beach Demographics

- Population of 461,522 within 50 square miles
- Fifth largest city in California
- 1970- 90% white
- Designated as the most diverse city in the nation
 - ▶ Hispanic/Latino 35.8%
 - ▶ White 33.1%
 - ▶ African American 14.5%
 - ▶ Asian 13.2%
- Largest Cambodian community outside of Cambodia
- One-third of population speak limited English
- As many as 65 languages spoken in LB schools
- Second highest in LA County in hate crimes committed by youth
- Hate crimes have increased by 230% since 1996
- Seventh largest gay/lesbian population in the U.S.
- Fifth largest senior population in the nation

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